



WAY OF CHOICES

BOOK 10

Mao Ni

EPUB CREATION BY LISA HAYES

Way of Choices

(Ze Tian ji)

(择天记)

by

Mao Ni

(猫腻)

Synopsis

To pick is to choose. This is a story about choices. Three thousand worlds full of gods and demons, with a daoist scroll in your hand, you are able to control the entire universe...

At the beginning of time, a mystical meteor came crashing down from outer space and scattered all over the world. A piece of it landed in the Eastern Continent. There were mysterious totems carved upon the meteor. Through viewing these totems, mankind comprehended the Dao and established the Orthodoxy.

Several thousand years later, the fourteen years old orphan Chen Changsheng left his master to cure his illness and change his fate. He brought a part of a marriage vow with him to the capital, thus beginning the journey of a rising hero...

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English Translation Hypersheep325; Pipipingu, Translator Emeritus @ [Binggo&Corp Translations](#)

Translations Edits by bbkgs @ [Binggo&Corp Translations](#)

ePub conversion by Lisa Hayes @ [Hasseno Blog](#)

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Chapter 901 – The Little Red Flower Leaves the String

In the snowstorm on the Bridge of Helplessness, Xu Yourong's South Sea Sword Cry and Chen Changsheng's Descent of Heavenly Music were opponents, but today they were companions.

And these two sword techniques had both originated from South Stream Temple, so they were innately intimate.

The sword cry and sword hum rose together, lingering and changing, becoming increasingly emotional and high-pitched until they peaked and then ceased to be heard.

That it could not be heard did not mean that no sound was being made. The pair's swords were just vibrating at such a high frequency that normal people could no longer hear them.

People could not hear, but the flower could.

The assault of these noiseless waves of sound caused the little red flower to suddenly halt. Then, like it was being buffeted by the wind, it began to sway.

The petals began to blur as they oscillated at high speeds while the glistening beads of water were shaken into even finer drops and sent flying in every direction.

The water drops seemed soft and pliable, but they actually contained Bie Yanghong's vigorous true Qi. Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong's awe-inspiring sword intent was quickly neutered, the might of these water drops no less than swift arrows.

The plateau resounded with shrill whistles and light pops. The hard plateau ground and rocks were quickly covered in a dense patchwork of tiny holes.

The crowd was speechless at this sight, their faces pale from shock, all of them imagining their wretched state if they had been

the ones in that battle.

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The little red flower floated in the air, still delicate, but the departure of the water drops had made it seem more wilted. However, it was still far from dispersing.

And whether it was a sword cry or a sword hum, they would eventually stop.

At that moment, what would Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong rely on to resist Bie Yanghong's powerful attack?

Chen Changsheng knew that he could not allow this situation to continue. With a nudge from his spiritual sense, a stone shot out of his sleeve and towards the flower.

It was not a Heavenly Tome Monolith in the form of a stone pearl, but an object closely related to the Heavenly Tome Monoliths: a white Heavenstone.

This white Heavenstone was extremely round and smooth, its brim inlaid with an array formed of black gold, creating an object of stunning beauty. It was a treasure of the Orthodoxy: the Falling Star Stone!

With Chen Changsheng's current cultivation, he was far from being able to display the true power of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, so he chose to use the Falling Star Stone.

In his understanding, the Falling Star Stone was ideal for dealing with the red flower.

A timeworn power from an ancient era manifested on the plateau as the Falling Star Stone appeared.

Cold wind began to pour towards the Falling Star Stone while the gravel on the ground that had just stopped rolling about began to roll once more.

Even the surrounding laws of the world began to twist, just like the red flower had done not long ago.

An almost bottomless black hole appeared in the air and began to widen.

The Falling Star Stone floated, exuding a faint light, appearing just like a star.

As expected, the little red flower ceased pressing forward. It paused on the perimeter, seemingly opposing the Falling Star Stone.

If Chen Changsheng wanted to leave, he only needed to wait a few moments and then use the spatial path torn open by the Falling Star Stone to appear several hundred li away.

But he did not intend to leave. At the same time, Bie Yanghong would not give him this chance.

A fist flew through the air.

The string on its pinkie was taut as if it was forged from metal.

The little red flower was carried forward.

The string passed through the black vortex formed by the Falling Star Stone.

With a light clap, the string snapped.

This string had been tied to Bie Yanghong's pinkie finger for many, many years. It had not even broken during the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, so it was assuredly no ordinary object.

At this moment, it finally snapped, unable to resist the fissuring of space.

But the black vortex formed by the Falling Star Stone was also snapped into two by that strange string, after which it quickly began to fade.

Bie Yanghong's fist was now in front of the red flower. It blew

through the remains of the black vortex and thundered towards Chen Changsheng!

What sort of fist was this? It had such terrifying might that it was even able to shatter the spatial barrier created by a treasure of the Orthodoxy!

A Phoenix cry rose up and the shadow of a green tree appeared in midair.

Her white temple uniform swaying, Xu Yourong gripped her bow and transformed it into the Tong Palace.

But Bie Yanghong's fist was too fast. Before the Tong Palace could finish forming, it was blown to pieces!

A stream of blood trickled from the corner of Xu Yourong's lips, a sign that she had been injured.

Bie Yanghong's expression did not change, his fist continuing forward!

Seeing that fist getting closer and closer, Chen Changsheng recalled that night in the Mausoleum of Books.

On that night, Bie Yanghong was heavily injured by the Tianhai Divine Empress's fist.

It was only now that he realized that the heavily injured Bie Yanghong had comprehended something. He no longer placed his mind on external things, instead learning to congeal the heavens and earth on his body!

Bie Yanghong's fist had some similarities to the fist of the Tianhai Divine Empress!

Compared to that night, he was at a higher level, in both cultivation and fighting power!

He had already been an incredibly powerful expert of the Divine Domain, but now he was even stronger. How could he possibly be dealt with?

Bie Yanghong had spoken correctly. Although both Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong had shocking levels of talent, this was still their first time using this combination sword style, so they could not use it perfectly.

At this moment, whether it was the combination sword style, the treasure of the Orthodoxy, or Xu Yourong, none of them could help Chen Changsheng.

He could now only use his own strength to receive Bie Yanghong's punch.

How could he do it?

Chen Changsheng used his own punch.

A moment ago, he had brought his sword back, causing it to hum with the Descent of Heavenly Music.

This moment, he held his sword horizontally, forming the Stupid Sword.

He then clenched his left hand and punched at Bie Yanghong's fist.

His fist whistled through the air, the five stone pearls on his wrist incessantly shuddering as if carrying some immense weight.

A sound so massive that it was hard to describe boomed out from the plateau to several dozen li away.

The fishermen on the fishing boats on the Tong River, who still had not had the time to stand, instantly paled and continuously kowtowed, praying that the thunder would remain far away.

The movement on the plateau was naturally greater.

The collision of two massive energies caused the ground to sink almost a foot. A half-dome of Qi appeared and then almost immediately burst apart, unleashing countless waves of Qi.

The wind howled and the nearby cultivators were all caught up in the ripples of Qi, no matter how quickly they had moved, and

were sent crashing into the ground.

In the waves of Qi, one could see a swiftly retreating figure. After several hundred zhang, it crashed into the center of the plateau.

A deep furrow had appeared on the plateau, looking like it had been ploughed out.

Chen Changsheng stood at the end of this furrow, his face pale and expression a little dazed. He had apparently suffered incredibly severe injuries.

As the dust was beginning to settle, Bie Yanghong drew back his fist. Just as he was preparing to lunge forward, he suddenly stopped. A wave of his right hand jolted back an arrow that had seemingly come out of the blue.

Xu Yourong, dressed in her white temple uniform, held the Tong Bow ready, her black hair buffeted by the wind. Ten-some Wu Arrows hovered in the air, ready to attack at any moment.

This was the first time many people had seen Xu Yourong like this.

Only a small number of people knew that this was Xu Yourong's strongest move.

If Bie Yanghong continued to pursue Chen Changsheng, he would have to expose his back to a thundering shower of Wu Arrows.

Even though he was an expert of the Divine Domain, he had to consider whether this was worthwhile.

Chapter 902 – The Blade Descends, Blue Clothes Soaked

The plateau instantly fell silent.

From the moment Bie Yanghong attacked, everyone, whether it was the South Stream Temple disciples, Gou Hanshi, or Hu Thirty-Two, stopped, no matter how concerned or nervous they were.

Bie Yanghong had issued a challenge to Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong, which meant that he had recognized that Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong working together could fight a battle with an expert of the Divine Domain.

Since this was a battle of equals, it required respect.

The string had already been severed, and only several inches of it remained on Bie Yanghong's pinkie finger. The little red flower drifted in the air, appearing like a rootless duckweed, somewhat delicate and pitiful.

Logically speaking, with Bie Yanghong's strongest move broken, the crowd should have viewed Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong with more optimism.

But after witnessing Bie Yanghong's punch, who would dare make this judgment?

More importantly, Bie Yanghong had used the supreme strength of the Divine Domain and his abundant experience to successfully break apart Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong.

Now that Chen Changsheng was heavily injured, if he could not use the Unity Sword Art with Xu Yourong, how long could he last?

Everyone nervously watched, wanting to know what would happen next, upon which something completely unexpected occurred.

Somebody launched a sneak attack on Chen Changsheng.

This person was a true expert at the peak of Star Condensation.

The second-ranked Divine General of the Great Zhou, the White Tiger Divine General!

A cold and furious roar resounded through the plateau.

The White Tiger Divine General charged at Chen Changsheng's back, both hands on his spear as he stabbed at Chen Changsheng!

The spear flew through the air, bursting with power and savagery. It seemed intent on piercing straight through Chen Changsheng's body, even nailing him to the floor!

Chen Changsheng was severely wounded and slightly dazed. It was obvious that he had not yet recovered from Bie Yanghong's heaven-shaking fist.

This attack of the White Tiger Divine General was a spear that contained the sum of his entire life of cultivation. If it could pierce through Chen Changsheng's defenses, it would run straight through his Ethereal Palace.

At this moment, even if the Tianhai Divine Empress reincarnated or Wang Zhice suddenly appeared on the scene, he would be beyond saving.

At this moment, who could alter this course of events?

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A single blade.

Dropped from the sky.

Giving its answer.

This blade ignored the distance between the heavens and the earth, dropping straight from the sky to the plateau. With a bold demeanor, it slashed at the White Tiger Divine General's head!

Seeing this blade, everyone on the plateau realized who had come

and immediately gasped in surprise.

Wang Po of Tianliang!

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The Prince of Xiang narrowed his eyes while his hands softly patted his belly fat that was somewhat discomfited by his belt. He did not strike, and he seemed to be thinking of something.

He had met Wang Po several days ago at Chicken Crow Mountain outside Wenshui City, and he had been anticipating his appearance today.

There were many people like the Prince of Xiang, just waiting for Wang Po to appear.

Wuqiong Bi was one of these. At the very beginning, right before she attacked Chen Changsheng, she had furiously yelled at the sky.

Wang Po had finally come.

He really did come!

Wuqiong Bi had been preparing for Wang Po's arrival the entire time.

She didn't know why the White Tiger Divine General would suddenly attack Chen Changsheng, but she did not care.

As long as Chen Changsheng died, she did not care who killed him.

With a shrill howl, she leapt into the air. The horsetail whisk in her hand, suffused with its aura of silent extinction, sought to bind that blade.

At the same time, her sleeve also flew up, as lithe as a dragon as it attempted to entangle the blade.

At this moment, she pushed her cultivation to its peak, putting more than a hundred layers of defense around this blade!

She was well aware that she was no match for Wang Po. At most, she could only block the blade for a few moments.

But these moments were enough!

She was confident that the White Tiger Divine General could undoubtedly kill Chen Changsheng in these moments.

Even if Chen Changsheng was still keeping some treasures in reserve, she was confident that her husband could swiftly defeat Xu Yourong and then kill Chen Changsheng!

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The situation on the plateau was changing too quickly, the scenes moving so quickly that they formed a stream of light. Other than those directly involved, no one could clearly tell what was happening, much less interfere.

No one noticed that a very unremarkable man had stealthily moved ten-some zhang closer to the scene of battle.

And no one noticed that in one corner of the plateau, amongst the cultivators from a minor southern sect, a blue-clothed individual wearing a bamboo hat raised their head to glance at the sky.

At that moment, Chen Changsheng was still in the midst of retreating, the White Tiger Divine General was taking his first step, and Xu Yourong had drawn the Tong Bow.

The individual with the bamboo hat was not looking at this soul-shaking battle, but looking at the sky.

There had been nothing in the sky at that time.

Of the thousand-some cultivators on the plateau, the blue-clothed individual was the first to look up at the sky. Even the Prince of Xiang had been a tad tardy.

He stood beneath a tree. In his eyes, the sky had likely been

partitioned into countless pieces, but which piece was he looking at?

Presumably the piece of sky that looked like a blade.

He sensed that Wang Po had finally come.

Only people that were very close to him could see that the blue-clothed individual was wearing a copper mask beneath his bamboo hat.

The copper mask looked very mysterious. At some point, a small corner had been lost from it, but it still firmly covered his face, revealing only his eyes.

The blue-clothed visitor gazed up to the sky, his eyes abnormally deep and indifferent.

He had been waiting a very long time.

The blade had finally come.

Thus, he had to begin moving.

He knew that this blade needed only three seconds to break through Wuqiong Bi's defense and cleave the White Tiger Divine General's head.

And in these three seconds, the White Tiger Divine General would not be able to kill Chen Changsheng. Given that Chen Changsheng was the Pope, he assuredly had the means to safeguard his life.

As for Bie Yanghong, even if he managed to force Xu Yourong into retreat in those three seconds, he would only capture Chen Changsheng, not kill him.

And only he had the ability to kill Chen Changsheng in those three seconds.

In his initial plan, the blue-clothed visitor had never thought about personally taking action, as this increased his risk of being exposed. However, he had not expected the Prince of Xiang to be so

composed. From start to end, other than using the Blazing Sun Style to shout, he had remained passive. Now that Wang Po was here, there was even less chance that the Prince of Xiang would act.

The greatest surprise of all was that Xu Yourong had disregarded the possibly irreparable harm on her cultivation to break her seclusion, and that the sword style she and Chen Changsheng used was so mystical that it was even able to contend against an expert of the Divine Domain. If not for her, Chen Changsheng would probably have been killed by Wuqiong Bi.

When all these surprises came together, it led to the conclusion that if he did not act, Chen Changsheng had a chance to survive.

Fortunately, the situation was still under his control.

Wang Po was being blocked by Wuqiong Bi, Xu Yourong by Bie Yanghong, and Chen Changsheng was already finding it difficult to block the White Tiger Divine General's explosive blow.

As for Gou Hanshi, the other disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect, the disciples of South Stream Temple, and those priests, they were still a distance away and not worth his consideration.

He was confident that as long as he moved, Chen Changsheng would assuredly die.

Now was the best opportunity.

This opportunity could not be missed.

Chapter 903 – The Flower's Weight upon the World

Wuqiong Bi's horsetail whisk and Daoist robe wrapped the blade descending from the heavens in layer after layer of defense.

Wu Arrows were flying all around Bie Yanghong like a torrential rain.

The White Tiger Divine General's spear was stabbing forward.

As the blue-clothed visitor predicted, the spear was not able to pierce through Chen Changsheng's body.

A Qi most divine appeared, the Orthodoxy's Divine Staff appearing behind Chen Changsheng's back and blocking this fierce and treacherous blow!

The White Tiger Divine General roared, his true essence exploding. The spear pierced through the divine radiance and continued to press towards Chen Changsheng.

With a zing, Chen Changsheng brought his sword to bear, blocking the White Tiger Divine General's attack, causing his face to pale even further.

At this moment, another Qi appeared over the plateau.

This Qi was difficult to describe with words. It had a very unique odor, rich with the scent of blood, but it was not fetid. All it did was cause an incomparable fear.

It had the stench of seawater, but it also had the smell of blood flowing from fish that had had their fins cut off and been thrown back into the sea.

This Qi was powerful to a terrifying level. Even the sacred Qi of the Orthodoxy's Divine Staff was suppressed by it!

This Qi came from the blue-clothed visitor.

At the final moment, there was no more need to hide. He brashly exuded his Qi to the world, revealing the unimaginable power of his cultivation!

The cultivators from that minor southern sect near him began to vomit blood and collapse under the fierce oppression of this despotic Qi.

The blue-clothed visitor swung his palm at Chen Changsheng's back over a vast distance!

Above the plateau, a massive blue palm appeared. Imbued with the sea wind and bloody waters, it howled down at Chen Changsheng's head.

This blue palm contained a massive energy, like the sea itself was slamming down!

Compared to the blue-clothed visitor, Wuqiong Bi's lotus sea was far weaker!

When she sensed this Qi and saw the blue-clothed stranger, Xu Yourong's face paled as she thought, where did this expert come from!

The blue-clothed visitor was much stronger than Wuqiong Bi, so he had to be an expert who had spent many years immersed in the Divine Domain.

The problem was that there were not many of these experts on the continent, so who could not recognize one of them?

This visitor's Qi clearly did not belong to any of the known Divine Domain experts, so just where did he come from?

Tang Thirty-Six, Gou Hanshi, Hu Thirty-Two, the priests, and the South Stream Temple disciples were all dumbstruck, incapable of even gasping in surprise.

Chen Changsheng was already using his battered body to resist the White Tiger Divine General and now being ambushed by a

terrifying Divine Domain expert; anyone could see that his situation was hopeless.

Who could save him now?

The Garden of Zhou's monster tide or Nanke? Or was it the Heavenly Tome Monoliths on his wrist?

No, none of them would do.

The cultivation of this blue-clothed visitor was far too terrifying!

Suddenly, the blade energy in the sky exploded, the light coming down from the sky seemingly gaining a cold gleam.

It was apparent that Wang Po had perceived the blue-clothed visitor's Qi and killing intent, and wanted to break through the lotus sea to save Chen Changsheng.

Thread by thread, the horsetail whisk began to collapse, and the blade was on the verge of descending.

But it still did not fall.

Clear light illuminated the plateau, forceful blade intent falling at the same time.

The visitor remained unmoved.

He had calculated very clearly.

Three seconds was three seconds.

Wuqiong Bi was able to block that blade for at least three seconds.

After he killed Chen Changsheng, the blade energy descending from the heavens might injure him, but what did it count for then?

Wuqiong Bi and Bie Yanghong had to bear the crime of killing the Pope, so they would assuredly work with him.

With three experts of the Divine Domain working together, no matter how strong that blade was, what could it do?

No matter how cautious the Prince of Xiang was, could he still not possibly see how the situation would turn out?

Given the temperament of the Chen Imperial clan, he would assuredly step forward and strive to put on the most sterling performance.

Wang Po would undoubtedly die!

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Wang Po dead.

The Pope dead.

The Holy Maiden dead.

The Li Palace broken.

Holy Maiden Peak still.

The Orthodoxy waning.

White Emperor City already in hand.

Coercing Xuelao City to control the Imperial Court.

Dividing the world into three.

Then dividing the world into two.

And finally ruling the world alone!

This painting of breathtaking beauty had already floated in the imagination of him and his clansmen for many years, sketched out in secret.

Today, it was finally welcoming a most glorious beginning.

The blue-clothed visitor's eyes remained dark and cold, but in their depths, that flame called ambition was already beginning to blaze.

As long as his palm landed, no matter what treasures Chen Changsheng still had, even the divine artifacts of the Orthodoxy,

they would all be crushed into powder.

For this, he was even prepared to lose several fingers.

And yet.

In the next moment.

A dark red smear suddenly appeared on his painting of immaculate beauty!

All the designs, like the powerful army, the strolling on the Divine Path, the peering into the abyss, were all smeared by that red tint, their images ambiguous and impossible to clearly make out!

The red grew more and more vivid, as if turning into blood.

The flames in the depths of the visitor's eyes were suddenly extinguished.

Because his palm did not fall.

Chen Changsheng did not die.

His palm had been blocked by a little red flower.

All the red that he saw came from this flower.

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A massive thud resounded in the ears of everyone on the plateau.

It was like something striking wet cotton, or wet mud, or a [moist red](#).

A little red flower had appeared behind Chen Changsheng's back.

And then, it began to bloom, blossoming with countless petals, swaying and rising, bearing the descent of the massive palm of blue light.

The shadows were instantly disordered, killing intent suddenly rising. The blue-clothed visitor's pupils suddenly constricted.

He naturally recognized that red flower.

All cultivators recognized that red flower.

This little red flower had been tied to Bie Yanghong's pinkie finger for many years.

It was only today that the string had finally destroyed itself together with the black vortex created by the Falling Star Stone, leaving the red flower free to travel as it wished.

But where the red flower went and what it did naturally complied with its master's intentions.

Its suddenly appearance behind Chen Changsheng's back, blocking the blue-clothed visitor's lethal blow, was naturally Bie Yanghong's intention.

Why had Bie Yanghong suddenly rescued Chen Changsheng?

After all, Chen Changsheng was the foe who had murdered his son. Even if Chen Changsheng's willingness to leave with him had engendered some doubt, was it to this extent?

The visitor could not understand, nor did he continue thinking.

Because thinking required time.

As an expert of the Divine Domain, he needed only a thought to almost instantly calculate the cause and effects of many things.

But the blue-clothed visitor did not have even this amount of time to waste.

Three seconds was truly a short period of time, passing by in a flash.

The blue-clothed visitor immediately flew off the cliff, not even giving another glance at the battle.

Whether the White Tiger Divine General could kill Chen Changsheng or whether the Prince of Xiang was prepared to act were things that he no longer cared about.

He left like a thunderstorm, the drifting of his sleeves shattering trees as he instantly traveled several hundred zhang.

But the little red flower seemed to have a mind of its own. After shattering that blue palm, it suddenly vanished. It abruptly appeared in the air outside the plateau, scattering its petals, raining down to encompass an area several li in radius, sealing off the blue-clothed visitor's escape routes.

Each garish red petal contained a terrifying energy, every one of them as heavy as a mountain.

'Moist red' as well as the chapter title 'The Flower's Weight Upon the World' are both references to the poem '春夜喜雨' by Du Fu, which describes the beauty of flowers in the morning after a night of spring rain. The original line can be translated as 'Dawn shows the moist red, the flowers weighing heavy all across the city'.

Chapter 904 – Between Three Seconds

The petals drifted about in the wind, so dense that they seemed like a sea.

Bie Yanghong's figure appeared in the center of the sea of flowers, his feet stepping on air as he struck at the blue-clothed visitor.

Back when the Demon Lord entered Mount Han and the Elder of Heavenly Secrets informed the world, Bie Yanghong had been in the distant Ten Thousand Years Pavilion in the south, but he ended up being the first to arrive.

Even amongst the experts of the Divine Domain, he was the strongest in terms of speed and long-distance attacks.

Seeing the sky full of red petals sealing off his retreats, the blue-clothed visitor knew that his chance had passed.

If he could not forcibly repel Bie Yanghong, he would assuredly end up being endlessly pursued with no chance of escape.

The visitor roared, circulating the methods he had spent his entire life developing, and turned to deliver two swift palms.

Countless rays of awe-inspiring blue light shot out of his palms, transforming into extremely sharp flying edges that shrieked through the air at Bie Yanghong.

As the blue edges flew through the sky, they howled like a hurricane imbued with an aura of extreme cold and gloominess. They even caused the air to almost instantly grow more humid, forming beads of water and causing rain to fall.

It had all the horror and terror of a fierce storm at sea.

To experts of the Divine Domain, ordinary weapons, excepting truly divine weapons like the Frost God Spear or the Heaven Shrouding Sword, were far inferior to the power of weapons

formed from their own star radiance or true essence. For instance, for anyone so unfortunate as to even brush against these flying edges suffused with awe-inspiring blue light, even a Star Condensation expert with a body that had undergone a perfect Purification would end with their bones snapped and flesh flayed, their sea of consciousness fractured, and their Ethereal Palace cleaved into ruins. Without even a chance to counter, they would already be dead.

Bie Yanghong did not recognize the blue-clothed visitor, but he knew that they were both of around equal strength, so he would naturally act with prudence.

His right hand plunged into the sea of red blossoms, gripped something, and pulled it out.

Star radiance of incomparable brightness seeped out from his face and his grayed temples.

What he pulled out from the sea of flowers was actually an illusory sword condensed from star radiance.

A sword glow of startling brightness and purity illuminated the sea of flowers, cleaving out countless eddies of true essence as it slashed towards the blue-clothed visitor.

No matter how furious your stormy sea is, let's see if it can block my sword!

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The blue-clothed visitor had lived on the Great Western Continent for many years. Although separated by a vast sea, he had always kept an eye on the experts of the continent. With his authority and the assistance of White Emperor City, he had secretly gathered all sorts of intelligence, giving him a deep understanding of the fighting style and most powerful techniques of the continent's experts.

As Bie Yanghong's sword slashed, at least seventeen ways to counter it had appeared in his sea of consciousness.

But those seventeen ways were all based on what he knew of Bie Yanghong. To put it more accurately, it was the Bie Yanghong from the coup of the Mausoleum of Books.

Today's Bie Yanghong was clearly much stronger than the Bie Yanghong from his intelligence reports and in his mind.

Like that fist of Bie Yanghong's that had broken through the combined sword style of Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong.

And there was his little red flower as well. No one had expected that when bereft of its string, it could become a sea of flowers and seal off the uncountable paths in the world.

These moves were clearly new Daoist techniques that Bie Yanghong had become enlightened to after the coup of the Mausoleum of Books.

If that were all, the blue-clothed visitor would still be confident in his ability to push back Bie Yanghong. Perhaps he would pay with a few injuries, but he would at least not be delayed here.

But today, the greatest difference between the Bie Yanghong of now and his past self was not in the profundity of his Daoist techniques or in the mysticism of his moves. It was in the change to his fighting style.

In the minds of cultivators, Bie Yanghong was a gentle and composed senior. Even if he attacked, he would always act with the greatest propriety, his aura always one of justice and moderation.

Today, Bie Yanghong's eyes were still calm, but his expression was anything but gentle. As he lunged through the sky, countless streams of true essence surged out of his sleeves. Every one of his movements seemed to be imbued with the strength to move mountains, and every one of his techniques seemed to have borne witness to the world, and to life and death. He was absolutely

unrestrained, incomparably fierce.

Why was this?

The blue-clothed visitor saw Bie Yanghong's eyes and realized that in the deepest parts of those still pools was an absolute determination to kill.

And then, he saw the white streaks running through Bie Yanghong's hair.

The visitor understood the reason, and his heart slightly sank. He let out a roar!

Those countless blue edges shattered into powder at this roar, and then reformed into a long halberd!

This halberd had a dark luster, and its head was topped by three extremely sharp points that let out an awe-inspiring and fear-inducing aura.

This was highly likely to be a reconstruction of the weapon spirit of the Great Western Continent's divine weapon: the Sea-Pacifying Halberd!

Bie Yanghong appeared unmoved. The sword of star radiance in his hand slashed towards the blue halberd!

This illusory sword had been pulled from the sea of flowers and did not have a physical presence. Thus, it could have absolute sharpness and smoothness, just like Chen Changsheng's Stainless Sword.

But for some reason, a most vividly colored petal had stuck to this sword, its presence dazzling.

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The sword of star radiance and the dark blue halberd met in the sky.

A ball of Qi emerged from their clash, its surface crisscrossed by white streams. Almost immediately after, this ball of Qi was torn to shreds by the boundless light and heat erupting from the clash.

Waves of Qi, light, and heat swept in all directions. The rocks on the cliffs began to rustle down while several hundred ancient trees snapped and then began to burn.

The cultivators on the plateau found it impossible to see just what was happening in that blazing light. They could only vaguely make out two figures.

The Prince of Xiang quietly watched, his brows slightly arched, his thoughts inscrutable.

Wuqiong Bi did not turn to look, but she could sense the transformations from that area. In her shock and unease, her hand slowed.

With a rip, the threads of the horsetail whisk binding the metal blade began to snap. A tear also appeared on the sleeve of her robe.

The light in the sky remained blinding.

The bright red petals danced and retreated, a beautiful rain of flowers.

A stream of golden blood trickled down from Bie Yanghong's ear.

But he seemed completely unaware, his calm gaze remaining fixed on the blue-clothed visitor.

The sword of star radiance and the dark blue halberd remained in the same place.

The unimaginably vast reserves of true essence and Qi of these two experts of the Divine Domain were currently in a most perilous clash.

Suddenly, the bright red petal on the sword of star radiance suddenly exploded into powder.

This petal originated from the little red flower. It contained

limitless divine might and was implicitly in accord with the laws of the world, but it had been pulverized by the clashing true essence of these two experts!

The powder from this petal shot towards the blue-clothed visitor, each grain as swift and sharp as an arrow, but carrying far more power.

The visitor was still using his halberd to fight with Bie Yanghong and could not dodge. He grunted, relying on his body's cultivation to receive these blows.

With a dense collection of cracks and pops, the visitor's bamboo hat was shot through with holes. It scattered into pieces and was blown away by the wind, revealing the savage copper mask beneath. And many marks appeared on his body through which blood began to seep out.

Bie Yanghong was certainly not willing to let this chance go. He whistled and the petals in the sky all flew back like lightning, assailing the blue-clothed visitor.

The visitor grunted, his true essence exploding out. While worsening his injuries, he succeeded in jolting off Bie Yanghong's sword. His sleeves flapped as he took off into the blue sky, looking just like a massive seabird.

The sky of red petals had already been summoned back by Bie Yanghong. He only needed to avoid the last strike to successfully escape into the sky.

He had finally found a chance to escape from Bie Yanghong's attack. It appeared that many things had happened, but it was only an extremely short span of time.

If some person had a timepiece and was keeping watch, they would know that there was still a brief sliver of time before three seconds elapsed.

The blue-clothed visitor had also silently been keeping count. He

was sure that he had made no error.

The sky of petals had already reformed into the little red flower, which was now flying like a lightning bolt to slam into the visitor's back.

There was a crack as quite a few of the visitor's ribs snapped. He vomited blood, but he seemed unfazed. Without even a grunt, he wielded the halberd and shot into the sky.

He pushed his speed to its limits, swiftly turning into a black dot in the eyes of the crowd that could melt into the sky in the very next moment.

But in that next moment...

The black dot began to increase in size, gradually revealing a figure.

The blue-clothed visitor had returned.

He had been forced back by a blade from the sky.

Chapter 905 – Between the Divine

The blue-clothed visitor had been forced back because he had made a miscalculation.

Wuqiong Bi really could block the metal blade for at least three seconds.

The problem was that when Bie Yanghong began to attack him with an unprecedentedly fearless stance, Wuqiong Bi, as his wife, naturally reacted.

Afterward, whether she understood Bie Yanghong's actions or was still confused and shocked, it was only naturally that her actions be sluggish.

Ultimately, the blade did not need three seconds to snap the threads of her horsetail whisk and tear through her sleeve.

Thus, just when the blue-clothed visitor felt that he had finally escaped, he saw a metal blade coming at him through the sky.

A roar brimming with anger and reluctance resounded through the sky and descended upon the mountains.

What followed was the howling of the air.

A straight line fell from the sky into a cliff, and one could faintly make out two figures at its front.

Boom! Dust plumed up from the cliff, and a hole appeared.

The entire mountain slightly quaked. After a few seconds, one part of the plateau at the summit suddenly began to bulge, and then burst apart, spraying dust everywhere.

Two figures shot out of the dust and crashed into the ground.

The pair had fallen from the sky and plunged into the cliff at a downward angle, yet they had emerged from the summit, essentially boring through the entire mountain!

As the dust slightly settled, the figures became more distinct. The blue-clothed visitor was kneeling, his hands closed around a pitch-black metal blade.

The man wielding this blade was naturally Wang Po.

He did not turn around, and from his back, one could see steep mountains and rivers.

Bie Yanghong had already returned to the plateau. Dust billowed as his fist thundered towards the blue-clothed visitor.

Following this fist was still the little red flower.

The flower was missing a petal and appeared slightly lacking, yet it still possessed a terrifying might.

The blue-clothed visitor flipped his hands, holding the halberd horizontally to block the blade. Meanwhile, he stamped his foot, sending out a plume of dust to meet the flower.

The flower bloomed once more, a picture of delicacy and charm as it howled through the air.

Without rhyme or reason, the metal blade slashed down once more!

Crack! The blue halberd snapped!

The blue-clothed visitor roared, his sleeves stirring up a massive cloud of dust in an attempt to buy a few moments.

But the dust could not drown out the red of the flower, much less dissipate the glow of that blade.

Again, the red flower bloomed!

Again, the metal blade slashed!

Sliceslicesliceslice!

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Three unfathomably terrifying Qis rose from the plateau, straight to the dome of heaven.

The clouds in the blue sky fled in fear. Some that were a tad too slow were torn to shreds, thus vanishing.

A battle between experts of the Divine Domain could cause the world to change colors.

The crinkling sound of flowers blooming and the howling of the descending metal blade incessantly rose from the cloud of dust.

Vivid red and bright lights continuously intersected.

Suddenly, all colors and lights disappeared.

Boom! The dust exploded once more.

An area two li in radius at the center of the plateau suddenly sank half a foot!

And then came a long period of stillness, devoid of any sound.

The dust gradually settled.

The first thing that could be seen was the ground. It was like it had been crushed countless times, resulting in such a glossy and smooth surface that it seemed to be inlaid with jade.

And then Bie Yanghong's figure appeared.

His clothes were torn all over, and blood glowing with a golden luster was slowly trickling out.

He swayed twice, an extremely bright shade of red appearing on his face which then rapidly paled to a snowy white. He had most likely suffered severe internal injuries.

Soon after, Wang Po walked out from the dust, his right hand holding his blade, his left sleeve flapping in the wind.

As was his habit, his eyebrows were drooped, as were his shoulders, making him seem rather impoverished.

However, because of his severed arm, his left shoulder drooped

somewhat lower, making it seem rather unnatural. Blood was currently seeping out from the top of it.

In the battle just now, he had used the stump of his arm to receive a palm from the blue-clothed visitor, not willing to slow his blade for even an instant.

Of the continent's Divine Domain experts, Wang Po and Bie Yanghong were the two strongest at fighting.

Today, they had joined forces, their hand unyielding and their killing intent determined. They did not give the slightest leeway, and their purpose was crystal-clear.

They would not give the blue-clothed visitor a chance to leave.

They wanted him to die.

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The blue-clothed visitor's bamboo hat had been pulverized earlier, revealing that enigmatic copper mask.

A crack now ran through the center of this copper mask, a straight and clear line running from top to bottom, most likely inflicted by the blade. There were also countless cracks on the rest of the mask. It actually looked like some beautiful porcelain object, but now that it had lost its previous hardness, it also seemed extremely fragile.

The blue-clothed visitor swayed, a groan issuing from his mask.

Blood dripped from that straight crack, and then from the rest of cracks. It was a most bizarre and frightening sight.

His body had already been shorn of any hope to live by Wang Po's blade and Bie Yanghong's flower, his insides covered in cracks. Even his Ethereal Palace, star openings, and sea of consciousness were webbed with fine cracks. They could collapse at any moment, upon which there would be no more chance for him to survive.

The hundreds of ancient trees that had been snapped were still burning, though because they were wrapped in the moisture of the clouds, the flames were gradually weakening and would presumably extinguish soon. Several hundred plumes of dust were rising from the part of the plateau that had sunk half a foot, looking like a miniature tornado. This too was fading, on the verge of extinction.

This expert of the Divine Domain had reached the end of his life, and still no one knew who he was.

The plateau was absolutely silent.

Bie Yanghong looked at the blue-clothed visitor.

Everyone was looking back and forth between Bie Yanghong and the blue-clothed visitor, shocked and perplexed.

Just what was going on with all of this?

Weren't Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi chasing the Pope a moment ago to avenge their son?

Why had this blue-clothed visitor suddenly appeared? Why was it that when this visitor wanted to kill Chen Changsheng, Bie Yanghong not only did not help, but actually stopped him? Why did it seem like Bie Yanghong took on such a determined stance, not minding heavy injuries, or even dying together with this visitor?

"How did you find out?"

The blue-clothed visitor finally spoke.

He stared at Bie Yanghong, the eyes peering out from the mask still deep and serene, but already suffused with the aura of death.

As he spoke, blood suffused with a golden luster continuously poured out from the cracks in his mask, a strange and monstrous sight.

"Priest Xin should not have appeared at Fengyang City."

Bie Yanghong wiped the blood from his lips and said, "His appearance was too deliberate. It felt like someone had deliberately let us see him."

"This was truly a hole, or perhaps a place that was not done perfectly."

The blue-clothed visitor added, "That was not arranged by me, but it was because someone in your Imperial Court wanted to use this matter to get rid of him."

Many of the people on the plateau didn't understand this exchange, but there were naturally people that did.

The Prince of Xiang had already taken his hands off his belt. His eyes were subtly flitting about, but his thoughts were still inscrutable.

Chapter 906 – Between Father and Son

The blue-clothed visitor said, "But I believe that just this point was not enough for you to believe that Chen Changsheng was not the murderer."

Bie Yanghong replied, "Correct. The Qi of the Black Frost Dragon cannot be faked, so just a few moments ago, I still believed that it was the work of His Holiness the Pope."

The visitor asked, "Then how could you be sure that your son was killed by me, or at least suspect me?"

The plateau erupted into a clamor.

A few people had already guessed that this might be a scheme aimed at the Pope, but they couldn't help but be shocked at hearing the blue-clothed visitor personally admit it.

"The reason for my doubt is that someone showed me a few things when I was coming up the mountain."

Bie Yanghong waved his hand, and several sheets of paper drifted out from his sleeve. They hovered in the surrounding air, rustling in the wind.

This paper was white paper that had been drawn on with charcoal.

The lines of these drawing were not complex, but they were bursting with detail.

In the first drawing, there was a small alley, an ancient scholar tree, and a young man.

The young man's face was almost alive, his two eyebrows seemingly about to take flight. He was like a real person.

As he looked at the young man in this drawing, a hint of anguish flashed across Bie Yanghong's face.

The small alley and the ancient scholar tree depicted a part of

Hanqiu City, and the young man was his son, Bie Tianxin.

In the second drawing, there was a carriage. At the time it was drawn, there had probably been a gust of wind that had raised a corner of the window curtain.

It was just a glimpse, but through the charcoal pencil of the artist, it became a static and unchanging record.

In the carriage window was a proud and beautiful girl and a blue-clothed individual wearing a copper mask.

It was the blue-clothed visitor on the plateau today.

The remaining drawings all depicted various scenes, like the raging waterfall outside Hanqiu City, or the young man and woman walking side by side.

Each drawing was an incredibly accurate record which clearly conveyed what Bie Tianxin had been doing and who he had met over the last few days.

After Bie Tianxin's death, these records became clues.

The blue-clothed visitor gazed at these drawings in silence for a very long time. Suddenly, he asked, "You believe these drawings?"

Bie Yanghong replied, "I believe the artist of these drawings, but not entirely. In the end, it was your appearance that served as true proof."

"Now that I think of it, it truly was unwise for me to act, but if not for your doubt, you would not have decided so quickly, and I would still have had a chance to kill Chen Changsheng and leave. This being the case, I still lose to the artist of these drawings."

The blue-clothed visitor looked at the drawings and furrowed his brow. "I thought that the abacus beads were in my hand, that my plan was flawless, but I did not expect for all my tracks to completely fall in this person's eyes. Just who was this person that secretly spied on me yet went completely undetected?"

Bie Yanghong replied, "Qiushan Jun."

The blue-clothed visitor froze in surprise.

The crowd on the plateau became restless upon hearing this name.

Qiushan Jun was naturally a celebrity, but he had been missing for five years, so many people had almost forgotten about his existence.

No one had expected that when he next appeared, he would have accomplished such an impressive feat.

Bai Cai was even more shocked at this. He looked at Gou Hanshi and asked, "Eldest Brother? What's happening here?"

Gou Hanshi shook his head, indicating that he did not know.

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In that stream at the base of Holy Maiden Peak, the fragrance of roast fish drifted farther and farther, the rustling in the forest getting closer and closer. A few more audacious beasts had even peeked out their heads.

Qiushan Jun tore off a chunk of fish and threw it over, then turned around and said, "Father, it's useless to keep me here."

The Qiushan clan head took the roast fish and took two bites before proudly saying, "Don't think about tricking me."

Qiushan Jun said helplessly, "It's true—you came too late. I've already met Sir Bie."

The Qiushan clan head's jaw dropped as he found himself speechless.

Someone else would probably retort, "Bie Yanghong wouldn't believe you just off a few words." However, as Qiushan Jun's father, he was well aware of his son's sterling reputation.

Crucially, his son had always been a very thorough person. He must have other tricks up his sleeve besides just words.

The Qiushan clan head uneasily asked, "How confident are you?"

Qiushan Jun replied, "There was no direct evidence, and it did involve the murder of his son, so there's at most a thirty percent chance that Bie Yanghong believed me."

The Qiushan clan head slightly relaxed. "That's fine. Hopefully nothing unforeseen will occur."

Qiushan Jun added, "If the blue-clothed visitor can't help but act today, thirty percent will become ninety percent."

The Qiushan clan head became slightly apprehensive. "If I were him, I wouldn't even come to Holy Maiden Peak today, much less act."

Qiushan Jun replied, "The blue-clothed visitor has an unfathomable cultivation and a cruel and emotionless way of doing things, but in terms of scheming and patience, he's far inferior to Father. And besides, this place is Holy Maiden Peak, and Chen Changsheng assuredly has more tricks. Considering that Wang Po might have also come, he really might act."

Although these words praised him, the Qiushan clan head still felt gloomy.

Based on what Qiushan Jun said, if the blue-clothed visitor acted, Bie Yanghong would inevitably feel suspicious, and then Chen Changsheng really might survive.

The Qiushan clan head gave him a resentful glare. "If things have come to this, I can only think of some other methods."

Puzzled, Qiushan Jun asked, "What does Father want to do?"

The Qiushan clan head rallied himself, "If it really is as you say, then when the time comes, it's naturally time to announce your achievement to the crowd."

Qiushan Jun helplessly said, "I've spent today accompanying Father in roasting and eating fish. What sort of achievement is that?"

The Qiushan clan head sternly said, "Have you thought about this? If the Great Western Continent's scheme succeeds, His Holiness the Pope will die. Crucially, Bie Yanghong and his wife killing the Pope will assuredly cause the world to fall into chaos, the demons will assuredly invade, and the Human race will assuredly be rocked by storms. But now, none of this will happen, all because of you."

Qiushan Jun commented, "This logic sounds a little strange."

The more the Qiushan clan head talked, the more excited he became. He trumpeted, "How is it strange? Son, even calling you the savior of the Human race wouldn't be too much!"

Qiushan Jun helplessly said, "Father, this is a little too exaggerated."

The Qiushan clan head rebuked, "What do you know? Can you be so sure that my conjectures won't become reality?"

Qiushan Jun suddenly fell silent.

The fish in the stream silently swam into the distance.

The beasts in the forest had also disappeared.

After some time, Qiushan Jun finally spoke.

He looked into the Qiushan clan head's eyes and earnestly asked, "Father, since you also know that your conjectures might become reality, why did you do it?"

This scheme was targeted at the Orthodoxy and Chen Changsheng.

The executors of this scheme were the blue-clothed visitor from the Great Western Continent and Mu Jiushi.

But anyone could see that the Imperial Court had known of this

matter in advance, though no one knew how deeply it had been involved.

Qiushan Jun was even more sure that his father had known of it.

At this question, it was the Qiushan clan head's turn to fall silent.

Until the end, he still did not answer Qiushan Jun's question.

He stood up, rubbed Qiushan Jun on the head, then left the stream bank.

Chapter 907 – Between East and West

Wuqiong Bi rushed to the center of the plateau and held up Bie Yanghong's tottering body. She stared at the blue-clothed visitor, her eyes filled with spite and wanting nothing more than to bite him. She yelled, "So it was you! We have never even met you, and there are no grudges between us, so why did you kill our beloved son!"

"Your son was always fated to die a violent death. I originally thought using his death to throw the continent into chaos was rather good, but alas..."

The blue-clothed visitor regretfully said, "I didn't expect that though His Holiness the Pope and the Holy Maiden were so young, they would have such outstanding techniques. If not, there would be no need for me to appear."

This really was the case. If the harmonious strikes of Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong had failed to beat back Wuqiong Bi, he truly would not have needed to act.

Perhaps Chen Changsheng would have ended up losing to Wuqiong Bi, or perhaps Bie Yanghong would not have believed in Qiushan Jun's words, but in any event, Chen Changsheng would be in great danger.

"And there's also that Qiushan Jun."

The blue-clothed visitor melancholically said, "The Central Continent truly has many young talents, while we across the vast sea are inevitably peering up at the sky from the bottom of a well."

Wang Po said, "A few days ago outside Hanqiu City, I advised you that although I did not know of your esteemed identity, that it was best for you to not stick your hands into this continent's affairs."

Bie Yanghong looked at the blue-clothed visitor and suddenly said, "If my guess is not wrong, you should be Mu?"

He had spent many more years in the Divine Domain than Wang Po, so he still had some impressions on a few stories from long ago.

Hearing this, Wuqiong Bi and the three martial grandaunts of South Stream Temple appeared stricken with shock.

The Old Lady of the Mutuo clan had not said very much today, and nothing since the appearance of Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi. At this time, she suddenly propped herself up on her cane and sternly rebuked the blue-clothed visitor, "You westerners have actually come to make trouble again!"

The blue-clothed visitor was Mu!

'Mu' was the surname of the Imperial clan that ruled over the Great Western Continent.

In ancient times, referring to someone by only their surname signified the greatest respect in the human world, and this custom had persisted until now.

Examples of such included Yin, Shang, and Tianhai.

The blue-clothed visitor had only the name 'Mu' and was the most outstanding individual of the Great Western Continent's Imperial clan.

In terms of seniority, he was currently the Imperial Uncle of the Great Western Continent, one generation higher than the Empress of White Emperor City.

It was said that he possessed an unfathomable cultivation, incredible strength, and a cruel and arrogant personality.

When the Chief Princess of the Great Western Continent was forced to leave her homeland and cross the sea to the continent to become Madam Mu, Empress of the Demi-humans, it was said that it was because the Imperial Uncle had thought her talent too shocking, her potential too great. Believing that she threatened the traditional successor of the Imperial clan, he compelled her to leave.

Now that one thought about it, this rumor was not necessarily true.

The dragon breath of the Black Frost Dragon truly could not be fabricated, or at least such a feat had never been performed before. However, the demi-humans' founding their country was closely tied to the Black Frost Dragon tribe. It would not be difficult to believe that Madam Mu had found some secret method for fabricating Black Frost Dragon breath in White Emperor City.

Bie Yanghong looked at the blue-clothed visitor and asked, "The girl in the drawing is presumably Mu Jiushi?"

The visitor replied, "Bai Xingye and I have a terrible relationship, but he always doted on my niece. Do you really dare to go to White Emperor City to seek her out?"

Bie Yanghong said, "Let alone White Emperor City, even if she hid herself in the abyss behind Xuelao City, I would still want to kill her."

The blue-clothed visitor answered, "Then I will go first and wait for you there."

After saying this, he looked to the west.

In that direction were rising mists and stormy seas, but they were beyond his gaze.

Copper pieces stained with golden blood began to clatter down and pile at his feet like golden leaves.

Even at this final moment, still no one knew what the face of this strongest member of the Great Western Continent's Imperial clan looked like.

Within the countless rays of golden light, one could vaguely make out a somewhat elderly face.

The light grew brighter and brighter, then suddenly vanished.

No more would this person be found in this world.

Only the copper pieces on the ground were testament to what had happened here.

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This was a very long winter day.

Because too many things had happened, time seemed to pass very slowly.

In truth, from the three martial grandaunts' announcing the closing of South Stream Temple, Chen Changsheng's staunch opposition, and Wuqiong Bi's hate-filled voice, up to now, not much time had passed at all.

In this short span of time, the three seconds after the blue-clothed visitor struck were the most crucial.

The blue-clothed visitor had acted based on his assessment of the situation on the plateau. If Wang Po did not appear, he would refuse to strike. Wang Po's blade had appeared because the White Tiger Divine General had suddenly launched a sneak attack on Chen Changsheng. The Divine General had not believed that Chen Changsheng would be able to receive a sneak attack from an expert of his level.

The blue-clothed visitor had not agreed. He believed that Chen Changsheng, as the Pope, had countless means of preserving his life, so he had prepared himself to use the chaos to strike. Po's blade had already appeared, so who else could stop him? He had not expected that while he had been waiting for Wang Po's blade to appear, someone else had been waiting for him.

And he would never have expected this person to be Bie Yanghong.

This was the story of what elapsed in those three seconds.

In retrospect, this story began with the White Tiger Divine

General's spear.

If the White Tiger Divine General had not attempted to kill Chen Changsheng, none of the ensuing events would have taken place.

Then where would this story end? Would it end here?

No.

The heaven-shaking battle between experts of the Divine Domain had ended.

The blue-clothed visitor was dead.

But Chen Changsheng still lived.

The White Tiger Divine General withdrew his spear, glanced at Chen Changsheng, then turned around and walked away.

When he glanced at Chen Changsheng, his face was very indifferent, the meaning he wanted to convey very clearly expressed.

'Your Holiness's fate is truly excellent.'

Chen Changsheng looked at his retreating figure, his expression calm. But he did not put down his sword.

The sword intent began weak and insignificant, then began to congeal, going from simple to forceful to awe-inspiring.

The surrounding grass responded, rising up and stabbing straight towards the sky.

The White Tiger Divine General naturally sensed this sword intent as well.

The meaning this sword intent wanted to convey was very clear.

'General, do you think you can just leave?'

The White Tiger Divine General did not stop. He seemed to not care, a mocking smile appearing on his lips.

Your Holiness, I truly did want to kill you just now, but so what?

Your cultivation is inferior to mine, as is your ability to fight. You're heavily injured, so even if you have countless magical artifacts and treasures on your person, do you really think you can kill me?

Of course, that blade can kill me, even though Wang Po is also severely wounded. But do you really think that His Highness will just watch? As for afterward... I can go back to the capital and become Minister of the Army, and does Your Holiness dare return to the capital? Or I can return to White Tiger Pass, where I lead tens of thousands of soldiers, countless experts and array masters. How can Your Holiness deal with me then?

These were all thoughts which naturally no one could hear.

But his indifferent and arrogant expression and Chen Changsheng's unwillingness to put down his sword were already enough to make the situation clear.

The several Daoists of the Monastery of Eternal Spring flew over from the Imperial Court's diplomatic mission to the plateau's center to receive the general.

The blue clothes drifted in the wind, obscuring Chen Changsheng's view of the White Tiger Divine General's back.

Suddenly, a green leaf descended.

The green of these leaves was of a fainter shade than the blue clothes of the Daoists, so they seemed lighter.

These were the leaves of the wutong tree.

Several hundred zhang away, Xu Yourong had both hands on her bow, but no arrows were nocked. The Wu Arrows had already been fired.

It was those green leaves.

Chapter 908 – Between Life and Death

The green leaves suddenly quickened, becoming sharp arrows aimed at the Daoists.

The Daoists sensed the might contained in the Wu Arrows and they instantly turned stern. Not daring to slight these arrows, they immediately enveloped themselves in dim sword glows.

Chen Changsheng used this chance to move, using the Yeshe Step. When moving from the Dou Star to the Zhen Star, he suddenly shifted to the Niu Star. Like a wisp of smoke, he shot towards the White Tiger Divine General's back.

The White Tiger Divine General was too late to turn, but with a twitch of his face, his spear flew through the air!

He was somewhat surprised to see Xu Yourong suddenly attack, but he had long prepared himself for Chen Changsheng's sword.

Countless motes of star radiance poured out from the chinks in his armor, brilliantly shining as they formed a layer of light. This layer of light was extremely smooth and perfectly formed, practically without flaw.

Chen Changsheng's sword moved like a bolt of lightning, avoiding the spear and stabbing at the general, but it failed to pierce the layer of light.

Ever since he had learned the sword from Su Li in the wilderness, this was the first time he had encountered this sort of situation.

Before this, against even experts like Divine General Xue He or Xiao De, his Intellectual Sword had always managed to pierce through his opponent's defense.

Could this person actually have a perfect Star Domain?

Countless sword slashes, light, and heat splashed out from the clash between the two.

Through this light, Chen Changsheng saw the White Tiger Divine General's supremely apathetic face.

When Su Li was evaluating the current experts of this generation while they were traveling through the wilderness, he had said that there was no one amongst them that had a truly perfect Star Domain.

Today, the White Tiger Divine General's performance had seemingly overturned this conclusion.

Chen Changsheng was able to sense that this person truly was powerful, with only the most minute of differences separating him from Xue Xingchuan!

Whether he used the Intellectual Sword or the Blazing Sword, it would be very difficult to break this person's defenses in a short amount of time.

No one understood this more than the White Tiger Divine General. Through the light, he looked at Chen Changsheng with a faint disdain.

Suddenly, the disdain was scattered by a hint of pain, which in turn was supplanted by endless shock.

Someone had torn an opening in his perfect Star Domain!

What was going on here?

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Right before Chen Changsheng's sword clashed with the White Tiger Divine General's spear, someone had walked out from the Imperial Court's diplomatic mission.

In both attire and appearance, this was an extremely ordinary person, not the least bit remarkable, not attracting the slightest attention.

This person seemed to walk slowly, but they very quickly

traveled the several hundred zhang to the center of the plateau.

This person stepped very lightly, so lightly that they made no noise, did not stir the slightest breeze. They didn't even let out any breath or smell.

Even the peak Star Condensation expert that was the White Tiger Divine General did not sense this person coming up behind him.

Like a real ghost, this person quietly stood behind the White Tiger Divine General and indifferently stared at his neck.

Finally, somebody noticed this bizarre sight and felt a deep chill.

A person in the Imperial Court's diplomatic mission wanted to warn the Divine General, but they were too late.

The ghost-like person raised their hands and brought them down on the White Tiger Divine General's neck.

Several glints of light, so cold that just looking at them made one shiver, appeared at the front of this person's hands, looking for all the world like two sets of wolf claws.

This was the most cool-headed sneak attack, the wisest method of battle. Even if one had a perfect Star Domain, this person would still be able to come and break it.

The sharp wolf claws descended, tearing a gap in the smooth and perfect layer of light formed from star radiance.

It was a very small opening which might even be missed without careful observation.

The killing power of these two sets of wolf claws did not seem capable of harming the White Tiger Divine General.

But to the true experts present, these wolf claws were a most dangerous existence.

They could vaguely see a savage wolf silently creeping behind its prey and then indifferently lowering its head to take a bite at the neck.

Only when the wolf's canines punctured the prey's arteries, or perhaps when the prey's head had already been bitten off, would the prey finally realize what was happening.

So savage and so skilled in stealthy sneak attacks, who else could it be but Zhexiu!

The Prince of Xiang's expression instantly chilled, but a flame began to blaze in his eyes, circulating into a great sun. Bolts of lightning seemed to be sputtering out of his eyes.

A chilly wind rose up from his feet, howling around his plump body, making for him a new belt.

He sensed that something might happen to the White Tiger Divine General and had decided to come to his rescue.

But Wang Po's gaze fell upon him, his empty sleeve flapping in the wind, appearing like the string of a kite on the verge of descending.

Bie Yanghong also looked at the Prince of Xiang, the string on his pinkie blowing in the wind while the bright red petals behind him waved in unease.

The Prince of Xiang narrowed his eyes while his hands grasped his belt. It was still not clear whether he would intervene or not.

The standoff between these three experts of the Divine Domain lasted for only the briefest of moments.

Because in this brief moment, the battle was resolved, life and death decided.

Chen Changsheng was like the figure of a crane reflected in a cold pool far below, flying past the mountain range that was the spear.

Zhexiu's hands were like branches immersed in the cold light of the Demon race's Moon in the north, falling on the general's neck without alarming the bird that was the spear.

The White Tiger Divine General knew that someone had come

and broken his perfect Star Domain, but he did not know where this person was.

And he did not have any energy to care about that person's whereabouts.

Chen Changsheng's sword was already here.

The dagger, dazzling bright and clean, was combined with the Vault Sheath, increasing both its killing intent and sharpness.

The hole in the White Tiger Divine General's Star Domain was very small, but as long as a hole existed, it could be pierced through by the incomparably sharp dagger.

The Stainless Sword penetrated through the gap, bringing with it a gout of blood as it headed towards the Divine General.

The White Tiger Divine General roared, furiously circulating his true essence. Star radiance gushed to the skies like a furiously blooming flower.

But almost right after, this bright star radiance suddenly dimmed, as an even brighter sword glow had begun to shine.

Countless sword glows poured out from Chen Changsheng's hand like fish swimming upstream, or like fireworks over the capital.

It was a most beautiful and majestic sight.

Swords endlessly howled and cried, using their sharp sword intents to cut and hack at everything in the center of the plateau.

Whether it was the ground or armor, they were all hacked to pieces. In the blinding sword glows, the gap in the perfect Star Domain gradually widened.

The only sounds on the plateau were the incessant cries of swords and the howling of the wind.

Many people were aware of the Pope's famous simultaneous assault with a thousand swords, but they were still shocked speechless upon seeing the sight with their own eyes.

Were these sword glows the eternally famous swords of the Garden of Zhou's Sword Pool? Was this sword art the Pope's most powerful move?

Several hundred swords were cleaving at the White Tiger Divine General like a surging river.

Even with the White Tiger Divine General's powerful cultivation, perfect Purification, and vast reserves of true essence, how could he endure?

In a flash, his stalwart body was covered in several dozen sword wounds, blood spraying out in a torrential rain.

Chapter 909 – The Most Resolute Stance

From a certain perspective, Chen Changsheng's skill in the sword was rather unreasonable.

As long as he could break his opponent's Star Domain, then even if his opponent had a far higher cultivation level, they would still be greatly troubled.

Three years ago on that snowy day in the capital, he wielded his sword and forced his way into the alley of the Northern Military Department. Back then, Xiao De of the Proclamation of Liberation and several dozen elite assassins from the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets and the Department for Purging Officials had attacked as one, but still failed to suppress him because of this unreasonable skill.

A tinge of regret appeared in the White Tiger Divine General's eyes, after which it was slashed into nothing by the sword glows.

He knew that he had underestimated his foe.

But he would not give up. He waved his spear to protect himself while narrowing his eyes, staring into Chen Changsheng's.

The more swords controlled, the greater the rate at which true essence and spiritual sense were depleted. This was a principle that anyone could understand.

In his view, no matter how abundant Chen Changsheng's true essence, how calm and pliable his spiritual sense, this rain of several hundred swords could not persist for too long. He was confident that as long as he could endure for a while, perhaps as short as a few seconds, Chen Changsheng's true essence and spiritual sense would be exhausted, after which it would be his turn to attack.

The spear in his hand began to quicken its tempo, further tightening his defense. He even disregarded the sword glows

hacking at his arms and legs, only protecting the vital areas. Warding off Chen Changsheng's several hundred swords and that other foe he still could not find, he waited for the moment to counterattack.

This way of thinking was not wrong, and could even be considered the most appropriate way to fight. But after several seconds, he came to the stunning realization that Chen Changsheng's true essence showed no signs of being exhausted, or even waning! Just what was this? Even if he began to cultivate from the womb, meditating and performing Meditative Introspection, he could not possibly possess so much star radiance or true essence! And why was his true essence so serene? He didn't seem like a young man, but some old priest that had spent several hundred years in secluded cultivation in a Daoist monastery!

The sword glows filled the sky, seemingly endless.

The swords flew through the air in an unbroken howl.

The White Tiger Divine General was speechless, and thus began to sense a very ill omen.

If he had earlier risked injury to break out, he might have been able to avoid this rain of swords.

But he had decided to defend and counter, so he had missed his best chance, and now he could not find a chance.

It was like a water snake in a stream that, as the water chilled with the coming of winter, was tempted by the fish in the stream that were swimming slowly due to the cold waters. After hesitating, it decided to stay by the stream, and in the end, not only was it unable to eat the fish, it was frozen into ice and thus drew its last breath!

It seemed like a very long period of time, but to the bystander, it was just a few seconds.

A pot of tea would still be scalding hot, a stick of incense just

beginning to burn.

The White Tiger Divine General knew that he had to put everything on the line.

His true essence exploded, his spear stabbing through the air as he attempted to use his most powerful strike to force Chen Changsheng's swords to draw back in defense.

The rain of swords suddenly withdrew. Hovering around Chen Changsheng, they gleamed with countless sparks as they just barely managed to block the spear.

When the rain passed, what followed was the blue sky.

A blue streak of light flashed toward him while two hands covered in black fur descended on the Divine General's neck.

The White Tiger Divine General grunted as he slammed his spear against the ground, his furious true essence traveling through the ground and up to strike behind him.

And yet, the swords began to cry once more!

Countless sword intents of monstrous power hewed into the rock, severing the energy of his spear!

The White Tiger Divine General roared, using the remaining spear energy to take flight as he attempted to escape these attackers from both front and behind.

A shining bright sword glow flitted past his eyes and then flew into the skies.

Ten blue rays of light appeared above his head and then vanished into the air.

The Divine General's roar was suddenly cut off!

The plateau was silent.

A sword was stabbed into his chest.

A hole had appeared there through which blood gushed out.

There was a light snap.

A pair of hands had twisted his neck.

His head lifelessly drooped to the side.

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The White Tiger Divine General, second-ranked Divine General of the Great Zhou, had been at the peak of Star Condensation and was already very close to Xue Xingchuan in terms of strength.

In every aspect, he was stronger than Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu.

But today, he was subjected to the combined assault of Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu. Not only did he fail to win, he did not even get the chance to counterattack.

He collapsed onto the plateau, blood spraying out of his body. In despair, reluctance, and confusion, he died.

The plateau remained deathly still.

Too many things had happened today, and the situation had changed too quickly. Even now, there were still many people that had not completely realized what was going on.

South Stream Temple had decided to close the temple and so held a grand ceremony, inviting the Imperial Court and various sects to attend. Pope Chen Changsheng staunchly opposed, but then Chen Changsheng suddenly became the mastermind behind Bie Tianxin's murder and the target of Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi's revenge.

Just when Wuqiong Bi was about to kill Chen Changsheng, Holy Maiden Xu Yourong suddenly broke out of her seclusion and the pair used their combination sword style to shock everyone present. Bie Yanghong broke the combination sword style, but was blocked by Xu Yourong's Tong Bow and Wu Arrows. The White Tiger

Divine General used this chance to launch a sneak attack on Chen Changsheng, and Wang Po's blade fell from the heavens to the rescue, but ended up being delayed by Wuqiong Bi.

At this moment, the mysterious blue-clothed visitor from the Great Western Continent launched a seemingly unstoppable blow against Chen Changsheng. It seemed unstoppable because it did not seem like there was anyone present that was able to block the blow, either because they were being obstructed or because they had no reason to.

Bie Yanghong was one of the latter, and his actions had caused the situation to take a turn while also exposing the true answer to the riddle.

The blue-clothed visitor's plot was exposed, and then he died. Logically speaking, the story should have ended there, but it did not.

If one said that the White Tiger Divine General's attack represented the stance of the Imperial Court and the venerable Daoist Shang Xingzhou...

Then the White Tiger Divine General's death naturally represented the stance of the Orthodoxy and Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng had personally killed him.

There was no clearer stance in the world.

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The Prince of Xiang squinted his eyes at Chen Changsheng. "Your Holiness, you just killed him like that?"

Chen Changsheng did not speak, and Hu Thirty-Two was the one to reply.

The archbishop firmly declared, "This person attempted to harm His Holiness the Pope, a monstrous crime for which the

punishment should be ten thousand deaths."

It was just like several days ago in Wenshui City's old estate.

Tang Thirty-Six had demanded the Tang Second Master's death, his immediate death, his death before the sun had set behind the mountains.

The White Tiger Divine General dared to attack Chen Changsheng, so he had to die, die on the spot, die before everyone.

The Prince of Xiang said no more.

Bie Yanghong looked at him and said, "Once I return from killing Mu Jiushi at White Emperor City, I will go to the capital and ask the venerable Daoist if he had any knowledge of this matter."

He then turned to Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong and said, "My apologies."

Finally, he exchanged greetings with Wang Po, then left with Wuqiong Bi.

Seeing the lonely figures of the couple disappearing into the sea of clouds, each person on the plateau felt differently, with some of them feeling sympathy.

Chapter 910 – Dissolute as the Dispersing Clouds, a Response from the Forest

The Prince of Xiang prepared to leave.

Xu Yourong said, "Your Highness, please wait a moment."

The Prince of Xiang stopped and looked to her. "Is there a sacred decree?"

Xu Yourong said, "When I was young, I gave a very poor assessment of Your Highness. Now that I think about it, it was because I was not experienced enough."

The Prince of Xiang calmly replied, "The Holy Maiden's praise is too great. I do not deserve it."

The Imperial Court's diplomatic mission left the summit, so there was no need for Wang Po to remain.

"I will have to rest for a while. Please take care of yourselves."

He said these words to Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong.

Experts of the Divine Domain had a complete grasp over the laws of the world. Even if they lost to experts of the same level, they would still be very difficult to kill.

Today, he had joined with Bie Yanghong to kill the blue-clothed visitor. In order to not leave their opponent a single opportunity, they had also paid a great price.

Xu Yourong suggested, "It is fine to just recuperate here, at South Stream Temple."

"Scholartree Manor is not far, and moreover, there are still matters that need attending to, so it would be best if I did not trouble you."

When Wang Po said this, he glanced at the three martial grandaunts of South Stream Temple.

Everyone present knew what he meant. Huai Ren remained indifferent, Huai Shu appeared slightly angry, and Huai Bi's expression flickered.

Huai Bi was well aware that her actions today would draw censure. She had originally intended to leave with the Imperial Court's diplomatic mission, but to her surprise, the Prince of Xiang had not said anything.

The Vice Principal of Scholartree Manor led Zhong Hui and the other disciples forward. After bowing to Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong, they surrounded Wang Po and escorted him down the mountain.

The next to leave were the Old Lady of the Mutuo clan and the head of the Wu clan.

When the heads of these two great clans bid farewell to Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong, they had very humble expressions and acted very properly.

In the last several thousand years, these great clans had never stood on the wrong side.

So it was with the Liangs versus the Chens, Emperor Taizong versus the Prince of Chu, and the Tianhai Divine Empress versus the Imperial clan.

Before today, they had naturally been standing on the side of the venerable Shang Xingzhou and the Imperial Court, but the events of today inevitably had an effect on their stance.

The unification of the continent with the Great Western Continent, the rejoining of east and west, was the greatest undertaking after the confluence of humanity's north and south, and it had the full support of Shang Xingzhou and the Imperial Court.

However, the combination of Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong had rendered the unification of east and west into naught.

The Great Western Continent's scheme was exposed and the blue-clothed visitor was dead, but everyone knew that the Imperial Court's figure was assuredly at the back of this scheme.

Otherwise, Bie Yanghong would not have left those words brimming with murder.

The sudden return of three of South Stream Temple's martial grandaunts and their strenuous insistence on closing the temple was assuredly related to the Imperial Court as well.

It was now apparent that in these two matters, the Imperial Court had lost.

This was certain to change the thinking of the great clans.

If the rumors were true and the Tang clan really had decided to maintain a neutral position in the following days, they also needed to make a new choice.

"I'll send off these two elders."

Tang Thirty-Six glanced at Chen Changsheng, then he grinned and took the Old Lady of the Mutuo clan by the arm, escorting her to her carriage. He also didn't forget to make some idle chatter with the head of the Wu clan, asking him how his grandaunt was doing or if his cousin Mei was still like when she was little, losing her appetite whenever the weather got just a tad too hot.

Afterward, the various sects also came up, bowing to Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong, then bidding farewell.

Everyone had come to Holy Maiden Peak today to preside over the ceremony of the closing of South Stream Temple, but who would dare mention this matter now?

The three martial grandaunts had rather gloomy expressions, especially Huai Bi, whose expression was so dark that it was quite ugly.

From the moment she had broken out of seclusion to now, Xu

Yourong had not said a single word to them, or even glanced at them.

The last to bid farewell were the disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect. Gou Hanshi bowed to Xu Yourong and said, "I originally planned to see if there was anything that we could assist with, but... Eldest Brother might already be here. To be on the safe side, I still need to seek him out."

Since Bie Yanghong had received Qiushan Jun's message while coming up the mountain, Qiushan Jun had naturally come today.

As for why he had never appeared, different people had different guesses, but it probably had to do with Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng.

Xu Yourong thought for a while, then replied, "Take care on the road, Senior Brother. When you meet him, give him my thanks."

Gou Hanshi answered, "Senior Brother might not want to hear your thanks."

Xu Yourong replied, "Then ask him why he doesn't want to see me."

While she said this, she did not look at Chen Changsheng.

Ye Xiaolian and the other disciples of South Stream Temple, on the other hand, subconsciously gazed at Chen Changsheng, somewhat nervous.

In their view, given that the Pope was here, why was the Holy Maiden saying this?

Chen Changsheng did not notice these gazes. He was currently conversing with Zhexiu beneath a tree.

Though no one knew what exactly the two were talking about, Chen Changsheng had a rather grave expression while Zhexiu appeared silent and taciturn.

Gou Hanshi had originally planned to personally say 'goodbye' to

them, but after thoughtfully looking at this sight, he did not step forward, instead leading the Mount Li Sword Sect disciples down the plateau.

The Imperial Court's diplomatic mission had departed and the cultivators from the various sects and great clans had retreated. The stone path was very quiet and the somewhat intimidating forests were abnormally quiet. Presumably the birds and beasts in the forest had long since been frightened away by the world-shaking battles on the plateau.

As the disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect walked down the mountain, they enthusiastically discussed the events of today.

"Who could have expected for the situation to change so quickly! I was listening to Senior Brother's words and was just preparing myself to charge forward with my sword, but I didn't even have time to unsheathe my sword."

Bai Cai recalled those hair-raising sights and excitedly said, "Five experts of the Divine Domain, with four of them stepping onto stage, and a fierce individual like the White Tiger Divine General died just like that. When we go back, I'll definitely relay it all to Junior Sister. Once she knows that it was Zhexiu that made the final move, she'll definitely be happy."

Gou Hanshi chuckled.

Bai Cai continued, "As expected, Chen Changsheng is formidable. Junior Sis... I mean, Holy Maiden Xu Yourong is also formidable, and their Unity Sword Art is even more formidable, but the most formidable is still Eldest Brother. Today, if not for him, how could the Great Western Continent's scheme be so easily exposed? How could Senior Bie Yanghong and Wang Po set up a trap to kill the blue-clothed visitor?"

In his view, his eldest brother who had not appeared today was the most important person, and he spoke with a very proud expression.

The other disciples nodded in agreement, commenting that if not for their eldest brother, Chen Changsheng would have found it impossible to escape today's trap. Even with Wang Po's help, he still might have ended up dead. Even if the Mount Li Sword Sect disciples wielded their swords and came to assist, though Chen Changsheng wouldn't have died, he still might have ended up in a rather miserable state.

At this moment, a voice, clear and bright yet also rather lazy, arose from the depths of the forest.

"Where did this nonsense come from?"

Bai Cai's expression instantly chilled. Just when he was planning to ask for an explanation, he suddenly realized that this voice was very familiar, and his expression changed again.

Chapter 911 – South of the Stream, Somebody Speaks

In the depths of the forest was a clear and shallow stream. A grill had been placed on a rock by the stream, as had some leftover roast fish.

Qiushan Jun took a newly roasted fish from the grill and stuffed it in Bai Cai's hand, saying, "While eating fish, I'll see if you can learn how to keep your mouth shut."

Bai Cai was somewhat nervous. Taking the roast fish, he began to seriously eat, not daring to voice any more opinions.

The disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect took out their swords and began to spear the fish in the stream. For a moment, the air was filled with the splashing of water and laughter of youths.

Qiushan Jun washed his hands in the stream and then sat on the rock next to Gou Hanshi.

Gou Hanshi said, "I didn't expect that after you left the Mount Song Army headquarters, you would actually take the long way back from Hanqiu City. You came back quite a few days later than you said you would in your letter."

Qiushan Jun explained, "When I went from Sloping Cliff to the Mount Song Army headquarters, I saw somebody from the family and followed them."

With Gou Hanshi's intelligence, he immediately noticed the problem in these words. "Who?"

After a pause, Qiushan Jun replied, "Chen Changsheng."

Once he and Gou Hanshi began to talk, the ruckus in the stream grew much quieter.

When he said the name 'Chen Changsheng', he attracted the gazes of all his junior brothers.

And when Qiushan Jun finished retelling the story of Sloping Cliff Horse Farm, the stream was absolutely quiet, everyone remaining silent for a very long time.

Gou Hanshi was also quite speechless. He apparently wanted to say something, but he failed to get the words out.

Bai Cai's face was swollen red as he had just narrowly managed to avoid choking to death from a piece of improperly chewed fish.

"What are you all thinking?" Qiushan Jun expressionlessly said.

Gou Hanshi smiled and shook his head, indicating that he had no view on this matter.

With great difficulty, Bai Cai swallowed down that piece of fish then repeatedly shook his head, indicating that he did not dare give any opinion on his eldest brother.

Qiushan Jun looked at him and said, "Say what you want to say."

Bai Cai hesitated for a long time before finally whispering, "Eldest Brother... aren't both your and his eyesights just a bit too poor?"

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"Chen Changsheng is a decent person."

Qiushan Jun paused, then added, "Alas, we can't be friends."

He didn't know that Chen Changsheng had felt the same.

Gou Hanshi smiled and said, "I'm better than both of you in this aspect, because I can be friends with both of you."

Bai Cai squeezed his way onto the rock and squatted next to Qiushan Jun. "Eldest Brother, you're the truly outstanding one. No matter how formidable Chen Changsheng is, he still needed to rely on you today to walk away in one piece."

This was referring to how Qiushan Jun had used ten-some

drawings to convince Bie Yanghong and break the Great Western Continent's scheme.

But no hint of pride or satisfaction could be seen on Qiushan Jun's face. On the contrary, it was rather gloomy.

"I didn't like Bie Tianxin, so I didn't care that much in the beginning, and treated the matter too carelessly. I didn't expect that the people from the Great Western Continent would actually dare to kill him."

He fell quiet for a while, then said, "If I were just a bit more vigilant, he might not have had to die."

Gou Hanshi thought this over for a while, then patted him on the back. Changing the subject, he said, "For the closing of South Stream Temple, do we want to do anything?"

"Junior Sister has never needed anybody to worry about the way she does things."

"Zhexiu apparently seems to be having difficulties."

"We'll talk about it when we get back."

Qiushan Jun rose and began walking out of the forest.

The Mount Li Sword Sect disciples in the stream hurriedly ran out of the water and used true essence to dry their clothes. Carrying ten-some fresh fish, they followed behind.

The mountain path was still quiet and peaceful. The birds had felt it safe and returned to the forest, and the air was filled with their pleasant songs.

From the mountains came the sounds of monkeys tussling with each other.

Qiushan Jun leaned his head to listen for a while, then took a sip from his wine pot and led his junior brothers down the mountain path, his clothes drifting in the wind.

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The plateau on the summit of that mountain was empty of people, but the plateau upon which South Stream Temple sat was packed. Beneath the green trees and flowers, several hundred disciples of South Stream Temple quietly stood, no longer as nervous as they had been in the past few days. Upon smelling the cloying fragrance of the flowers, a few of the younger disciples even sniffed a few times.

The problem had still not been resolved, but since the Holy Maiden had already left her seclusion, what did these disciples have to worry about?

In the deepest part of South Stream Temple's complex, two prayer mats were laid out at the highest position in the thatched cottage. Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng were seated there.

At this sight, Huai Shu slightly frowned in displeasure while Huai Bi silently pondered her own thoughts.

Huai Ren slowly said, "Your Holiness the Pope has suffered significant injuries. It would be best if you went to rest."

It was obvious what this most senior martial grandaunt of South Stream Temple meant.

Regardless of what opinion Xu Yourong had on closing the temple or on the return of these martial grandaunts from their travels, these were all internal matters of South Stream Temple.

Since they were internal matters, they should be resolved by South Stream Temple. Even if Chen Changsheng was the Pope, it was not inappropriate for him to sit here.

But her words failed to produce a reaction.

All the South Stream Temple disciples, both within and without the thatched cottage, remained calm and quiet as if they had not heard anything.

Xu Yourong also acted like she did not hear. She only quietly looked at Ping Xuan and Yi Chen.

Before entering seclusion behind the stone wall at the summit, she had handed over administration of South Stream Temple to these two senior sisters.

Her calm gaze was now clearly asking them to give an explanation for today's events.

Huai Ren sighed, wanting to say something.

Xu Yourong continued to ignore her, her gaze remaining fixed on Ping Xuan and Yi Chen.

Although they were disciples of the same generation, Ping Xuan and Yi Chen had no will to remain standing. They had been kneeling for some time.

Yi Chen's eyes were moist, her voice shaky. "I truly did not know what to do."

As she said this, tears dripped from her eyes.

Xu Yourong knew that her nature had always been gentle and agreeable. Presumably, she had been unable to withstand her teacher's endless exhortations last night, resulting in her agreement to the closing of the temple on the plateau.

Ping Xuan was much calmer, saying, "This disciple knows her wrongs, but Master is old and weak, and she had no ill intentions. I ask for Temple Master to be lenient."

Huai Ren appeared somewhat startled. She didn't expect that this disciple that had defied her several times today on the plateau would now plead for mercy on her behalf.

But she did not accept these words because even now, she still believed that she was correct.

She calmly narrated the events of the past few days to Xu Yourong. Just like last night and today, she clearly explained why

she wanted South Stream Temple to close for ten years.

From start to finish, Xu Yourong did not say a word, only quietly listened.

Huai Ren said, "Today's matter seems to have been peacefully resolved, but Holy Maiden, by breaking out of seclusion, you have inevitably paid an extremely heavy price."

Chen Changsheng glanced at Xu Yourong.

Huai Ren continued, "What if these things continue to happen? Holy Maiden, how many times can you continue to pay such a price? How many times can Holy Maiden Peak pay such a price? The Imperial Court and the Li Palace, this war between teacher and disciple—why must we disciples of the temple have to bleed for them?"

At this moment, Xu Yourong finally spoke.

She spoke very softly, yet also clearly, with all the disciples standing beneath the trees able to hear her loud and clear. And these words went straight into Huai Ren's heart.

"Martial Aunt is an elder, so it is only proper that you concern yourself with the matters of the temple, but you are not the temple master. Or do you mean to say... that you want to take my seat?"

Chapter 912 – Mutual Loathing

Silenced reigned throughout South Stream Temple.

Huai Ren could not answer Xu Yourong's question.

She knew that there was no room left to maneuver, but when she imagined the scene of the temple in ruins and its disciples dead, she still made one last attempt to convince.

"I know that this way of doing things goes against the laws of the church, but I cannot watch as the two of you drag South Stream Temple into the abyss."

She looked at Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng and declared, "Neither of you have the right to do this."

Xu Yourong stood up and calmly looked into her eyes. "Before Teacher left, she said to me that South Stream Temple was made up completely of female cultivators who had innately delicate natures, that it was extremely difficult to eke out a living in this chaotic world, but to live one's life by quietly guarding one's Dao heart was an even more naive way of thinking, completely contrary to the Dao of South Stream Temple."

Huai Ren asked, "Could it be neither you nor Senior Sister recalled that the momentum of the world is like the flooding of the River of Hatred, that the slightest lack of attention will result in the overturning of the boat and the death of all hands?"

Xu Yourong answered, "Cultivating the Dao in itself defies the heavens. Even as delicate women, we must still grasp our Dao and press forward. Though standing on the riverside and watching the world pass by is truly charming and comfortable, if one is not even willing to get the bottom of one's shoes wet, how can one step upon the waves and finally reach the other shore?"

With these words, the blossoming trees swayed in the wind and the eyes of the disciples brightened.

"When I was young and lived in the capital, I jumped into the well of New North Bridge, and I stood on a bridge and jumped into a canal of the Luo River. Everyone thought that I was seeking death, but nobody knew that I only wanted to jump in to see what was true. Was there really a Moon? Was there really a legendary evil dragon? I even dared to do all this, so what does traveling down a river amount to?"

When Xu Yourong said this, Chen Changsheng glanced at her.

Before the battle of the Bridge of Helplessness in the capital, he had carefully investigated her, so he knew that these were interesting anecdotes from her childhood years.

"Master chose me to be Holy Maiden because she had a clear understanding of my personality and knew where I would take South Stream Temple."

Xu Yourong said to Huai Ren, "I can respect that you don't like my way of doing things and don't like Teacher's choice, but if you want to change everything? No."

Her voice was very soft, as pleasant to the ear as the most moving birdsong in a peaceful valley. There was no intentional threat in it, yet it also indicated that its words could not be questioned.

This was especially the case for the final word. Many disciples, Ping Xuan and Yi Chen included, recalled when Chen Changsheng had said the exact same word on the plateau.

'I can respect and understand, but I will not accept, will not be convinced by you, and certainly won't be changed by you. "No" is "no", and even if it's okay, the answer is still "no".'

But Chen Changsheng recalled that shout he had heard from Wenshui City's old estate in the snowstorm.

"Your second son is colluding with demons!"

Reputation was something he had only begun to gradually accumulate after the Grand Examination.

But Xu Yourong and Qiushan Jun had been raising their reputation from the day they were born.

They had lived on this world for far less time than these seniors, but in terms of reputation, who could compare to them?

All arguments came to an end.

Xu Yourong was the will of South Stream Temple.

In these ten-some verdant mountains, no one could shake her status, or even approach it.

Even if those who opposed her today were three most senior martial grandaunts.

Huai Ren sighed. As she saw Xu Yourong's expression, as serene as water, her own heart was one of stagnant waters. She asked, "Then how is Temple Master prepared to punish us?"

"I said that I could respect and understand. This being the case, Martial Aunt did not make too great of an offence. What punishment is required?"

Xu Yourong continued, "Martial Aunt's delight was to wander the world, but for the future of South Stream Temple, you were forced to cut short your cultivation and return. Now that I have broken out of seclusion, there is no need for you to concern yourself with the affairs of the temple. Thus, I invite Martial Aunt to continue traveling. I am confident that the scenery outside will not be lacking to the scenery here."

Given Huai Ren's seniority, it was truly rather inappropriate to punish her according to the laws of the church or the rules of the temple.

But to have these martial grandaunts remain at Holy Maiden Peak was even more inappropriate.

'Traveling' was just an invitation to leave so as to avoid mutual loathing whenever they met.

Xu Yourong had truly managed to handle this difficult matter with ease, with a broad and open mind. Presumably, even Huai Ren would be able to accept.

Yi Chen and Ping Xuan looked to Huai Ren with happiness in their eyes.

Just when Huai Ren was prepared to leave, Xu Yourong suddenly recalled another matter.

"But I do not wish for Martial Aunt to return after every little interval, as that will truly be a problem. Let us make it once every ten years then."

Yi Chen's and Ping Xuan's expressions slightly changed at these words. Would their master accept?

Inviting them to leave and travel could be understood as the courtesy of a junior, but only permitting them to return once every ten years was clear exile.

However, Huai Ren understood that what the Holy Maiden referred to by 'once every ten years' was the grand ceremony to the stars held every ten years at South Stream Temple.

Seeing as the Holy Maiden had not stripped her of her right to attend this grand ceremony, what could she say?

She ruefully sighed and walked out of the thatched cottage.

Huai Shu bowed to Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng, then turned and followed.

Huai Bi was already following Huai Ren out. She appeared composed, but her eyelashes trembled, and her eyes flashed with unease and freedom.

But soon after, the unease and sense of freedom in her eyes were completely supplanted by shock and fear.

Xu Yourong's voice resounded once more through South Stream Temple.

"Yuan Yueqin, did you think you could leave?"

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All of South Stream Temple's disciples raised their heads.

Some of them looked at each other while others looked around as they all thought, who is Yuan Yueqin? Was there such a disciple here?

Some of the more quick-witted disciples had already guessed.

Huai Ren stopped and silently turned to Xu Yourong.

Huai Shu had a rather perplexed expression, apparently confused as to what was happening.

Huai Bi had an extremely unsightly complexion.

More and more disciples began to understand that 'Yuan Yueqin' had been Martial Grandaunt Huai Bi's name before her ordination.

Huai Ren was somewhat uneasy.

Xu Yourong had not said 'Martial Aunt' or used the Daoist name. Instead, she had called her third sister by her secular name, the significance of which was obvious.

Huai Bi's humiliation turned to rage as she shouted at Xu Yourong, "Holy Maiden, what do you want to do?"

Huai Shu still had not completely reacted. She looked at Xu Yourong and asked, "She's still your Martial Aunt; how can you do this?"

Xu Yourong knew that Huai Shu had just this sort of personality and did not care. She only looked at Huai Bi and said, "Yuan Yueqin, you colluded with outsiders and attacked the disciples of the temple. Did you really think that after doing such things, I would let you leave South Stream Temple?"

Hearing this, Huai Shu finally woke from her daze. She glanced

at Huai Ren, wanting to say something, but not knowing what she should say.

To those disciples that had been on the plateau, Xu Yourong's words made them recall the scene from back then.

They had formed the sword array, their wills united into a wall as they contended against Wuqiong Bi, the situation extremely dangerous.

At this moment, their martial grandaunt Huai Bi suddenly injured them, thus breaking the array.

How could they possibly forget this sight?

Chapter 913 – The Incident in the Temple

After the array broke, the blue-clothed visitor suddenly attacked, the Great Western Continent's scheme was exposed, and Wang Po and Bie Yanghong joined together to engage in a thunderous assault. As a result, Huai Bi's actions became less conspicuous.

But many people had not forgotten.

Like the disciples of South Stream Temple, or Xu Yourong.

She looked at Huai Bi and calmly asked, "Just what did Shang Xingzhou promise you that you would do such a thing?"

Huai Bi knew that she was now in a most concerning situation. Gritting her teeth, she replied, "I do not understand your meaning."

Xu Yourong ceased her questioning. She turned to Chen Changsheng and requested, "Your Holiness the Pope, please comprehend the laws."

On the plateau, when Chen Changsheng put a stop to the closing of South Stream Temple, he had relied on his right as the Pope to comprehend the laws.

Xu Yourong was making this request partially to borrow his authority, but also to show to the disciples of South Stream Temple that he had this power.

Even though she was the Holy Maiden, she was still a woman with far too many things to keep in mind.

Regardless of the considerations that served as the basis for Huai Ren's decision to close South Stream Temple, Huai Bi's conduct on the plateau was utterly unacceptable.

Her conduct would be similarly unacceptable in any other sect, so the laws of the church naturally had clear punishments for her crimes.

"Either cripple her cultivation and exile her from the sect."

Chen Changsheng recalled the scriptures of the church he had memorized as a child, then continued, "Or imprison her so that she can reflect on her errors."

Huai Bi instantly paled, and she turned to Huai Ren, hesitant to speak.

Huai Ren wanted to plead for mercy on her behalf, but then she suddenly recalled how she, Huai Shu, and Huai Bi had traveled the world together for many years, how a Daoist from the Monastery of Eternal Spring had suddenly sought them out, and they had gone to the capital to meet the venerable Daoist Shang Xingzhou. She couldn't help but begin to doubt, her thoughts sluggish.

Xu Yourong looked at Huai Bi and asked, "Yuan Yueqin, which do you choose?"

Huai Bi noted Huai Ren's silence and believed that her senior sister had abandoned her. Hate rose from her heart as she clenched her teeth and asked, "Imprisonment? How long are you prepared to imprison me?"

Xu Yourong replied, "The day you understand where you were wrong is the day you will be released."

Huai Bi coldly laughed, and then shrilly said, "You just want to imprison me in Holy Maiden Peak for the rest of my life! How can I do as you wish!"

Xu Yourong's expression did not change as she calmly asked, "It seems that you are choosing the former?"

The former was crippling her cultivation and exiling her from the sect, the same punishment Mu Jiushi had received in the Li Palace. However, that princess of the Great Western Continent had her own clan's techniques to protect her after her cultivation of the Orthodoxy's methods was crippled. In contrast, Huai Bi had cultivated nothing but the techniques of South Stream Temple. If

this were crippled, how was she any different from an invalid?

Huai Bi turned even paler and spite gushed out of her eyes. "If I choose neither?"

Xu Yourong calmly replied, "Then I will have to represent the ancestors of the temple in directly carrying out the laws of the church and rules of the temple."

Huai Shu seemed to resolve herself, stepping forward to stand between Xu Yourong and Huai Bi.

This Daoist nun of fiery personality had no desire to come to blows with the current Holy Maiden. She just subconsciously did not want to see what might happen next.

The disciples of South Stream Temple thought differently. Swords began to brightly hum and sword intent rose up. The several hundred disciples seemed to be standing in random positions, but they were actually forming an extremely complicated sword array. The energy of this sword array was boundless and awe-inspiring, blocking off all paths down the mountain.

At this sight, Huai Ren sighed. Looking at Huai Bi, she advised, "If you look at your heart and find no shame, your self-reflection will only last a few days. I will wait for you at the base of the mountain."

Senior Sister, how can you be so... stupid!"

Huai Bi appeared extremely aggrieved as she said, "It's obvious that the Holy Maiden wants to use me to establish her power. Do you think she actually needs any evidence or reflection?"

Her junior sister's sincerity shook Huai Ren's will. She took a step forward, intending to speak with Xu Yourong.

Suddenly, a cold wind blew through the thatched cottage. Sword intent rose up, but in a passive state, while a harsh and cold Qi enveloped the area.

All this came from a sword, a very thin, long, and straight sword. The body of the sword was pitch-black, its surface glossy and smooth. It seemed to be constructed of black jade.

This sword of black jade was gripped in Huai Bi's hand.

Its cold and sharp edge was held in front of Huai Ren's neck, only a hair from her throat!

Huai Bi had used the opportunity given by Huai Ren stepping forward to capture her!

Huai Ren's complexion was somewhat pale, perhaps because the sword intent had inflicted internal injuries, or because her junior sister's sneak attack had wounded her heart.

Arrogant laughter resounded through the cottage.

Huai Bi looked at Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng, a proud expression on her face. Her smile gradually faded, her voice turning cold.

"Correct, you spoke rather well. Everything was my plan. The venerable Daoist promised me that as long as South Stream Temple was closed for ten years, I would become Holy Maiden."

Chen Changsheng asked, "What if Yourong broke the wall and left seclusion?"

Huai Bi coldly snorted. "Do you think that if I did all this, she would have any chance of exiting her seclusion normally?"

If she could not break out of her seclusion of her own volition, then what awaited Xu Yourong was naturally death.

"I truly did not expect you to relinquish the Great Dao for a man and break out of your seclusion."

Huai Bi continued, "As for the rest, it was actually very simple. It wasn't difficult to use the continued existence of South Stream Temple to convince this senior sister of mine who has rocks for brains, and it was far too easy to trick this violent but simple-

mindful other senior sister."

At this point, Huai Shu finally understood what was going on. She was absolutely furious, her body shaking, but she didn't dare move.

The frigid black sword was still at Huai Ren's throat.

Huai Ren's complexion paled even further, her eyes turning dimmer, and one could faintly make out a tinge of sadness in their depths.

Popopopop. Huai Bi's finger descended like the wind, blocking off several of Huai Ren's meridians and sealing off the vital Ethereal Palace.

A gasp of shock rose from within the thatched cottage: "The Divine Finger of the Worldstream!"

"Correct, I used the Divine Finger of the Worldstream. Senior Sister has no more chance to counterattack."

Huai Bi sternly said, "You juniors actually had the audacity to disrespect me. If there's a chance, I'll definitely let you try out the feeling of thousands of ants running through your body!"

As she spoke, Huai Ren's complexion went from pale white to green, seeming in terrible pain. It was clear that she was currently enduring the pain inflicted by the Divine Finger of the Worldstream.

Ping Xuan, Yi Chen and the other disciples of South Stream Temple were infuriated at this sight, but out of fear of the black sword, they did not dare step forward.

"Of course, I have no hopes that this is enough to force you to step down."

Huai Bi coldly said to Xu Yourong, "Aren't you one of those most ungrateful and unfeeling people of Zhou? Just let me leave."

Xu Yourong ignored her. She looked at the captured Huai Ren

and said, "See, Martial Aunt. Martial Aunt perhaps has good intentions, but this world has always been bad."

Huai Bi didn't understand her meaning, and her voice turned even harsher. "Just quickly withdraw the sword array!"

Xu Yourong continued to ignore her and quietly gazed at Huai Ren.

Huai Ren's expression turned even gloomier.

The pain inflicted by the Divine Finger of the Worldstream? Compared to the pain of being betrayed by the junior sister one doted on for centuries, it truly wasn't much.

Chapter 914 – Thoughts Are Easy to Guard, but Not the Heart

Huai Shu looked at Huai Bi and angrily said, "Why aren't you quickly releasing Senior Sister!"

Xu Yourong's gaze suddenly shifted to Huai Bi's face.

Huai Bi felt like two blazing rays of light had appeared in front of her as her view was engulfed by a blinding radiance.

With a bang, a gale howled through the cottage, causing the white thatch to sway. Wings of fire, ten-some zhang in length, occupied everyone's gazes.

Xu Yourong had revealed the body of the true Phoenix!

Infinite light spread in all directions while the temperature rapidly climbed, the thatched cottage seemingly on the verge of blazing.

Huai Bi felt an unimaginable pressure. In her wrath, she retreated, but she did not let Huai Ren go.

Suddenly, Huai Ren's face went ghastly white and she vomited a mouthful of crimson blood!

Huai Bi slightly froze, lowering her head to look as she felt a hint of wariness.

But it was already too late.

Huai Ren's seemingly thin and fragile body exploded with a vigorous power, so pure that it seemed to have been washed in the south stream for several centuries!

The frigid black sword was sent flying.

Huai Bi felt like a green mountain had smashed into her stomach. With a roar, she quickly retreated backward.

Huai Ren turned around, her figure like smoke and also like the

fragrance of a flower as she attacked.

Her hands descended, seemingly subdued, but also imbued with the purest principles of the world, absolutely unavoidable.

Ten-some light pops echoed through the flowering trees of South Stream Temple.

These were the sounds of Huai Ren's finger pressing upon Huai Bi.

There was a thump, the howling of wind, and then it all gradually dissipated.

A pit, three feet deep, had appeared amongst the trees of South Stream Temple.

Huai Bi stood in the bottom of this pit, her face pale and body drenched in blood.

"How is this possible?"

She somewhat crazily muttered to herself.

Huai Ren calmly stood in front of her. "Know what it is to be male, protect what it means to be female, thus allowing one to become the Worldstream. Junior Sister, you've never managed to learn this finger technique correctly." (TN: This saying originates from the first line of Chapter 28 of the 'Daodejing'.) Huai Bi shrieked and turned to leave.

With a rush of wind, a figure descended like thunder and slammed against her.

Huai Bi gasped in pain as she crashed amongst the trees.

The figure walked out. It was the fiery Huai Shu.

There was not only fragrance amongst the flowering trees, but also sword intent.

Ten-some sword intents rose with an intimidating aura.

Huai Bi let out yowl after yowl. Her body suddenly fell, finally

unable to endure as she was forced back by the sword glows.

Flowers fell, forming a burial mound.

She fell back into the pit.

Her left arm had been severed and her body was covered in wounds from which blood dripped. She was in a most miserable state.

She looked at Huai Ren and arduously crawled forward. With a sob in her voice, she called out, "Senior Sister, spare me."

Huai Ren quietly gazed at her, saying nothing.

Those sobs tinged with pain gradually faded, a symbol of her despair.

Huai Ren thought quietly for a very long time. Finally, she turned to Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng in the cottage, bowed, then left.

Huai Shu glanced at the bottom of the pit and then followed.

The disciples of South Stream Temple entered the pit and dragged Huai Bi out and to the back of the plateau.

Huai Bi imagined the miserable fate she would soon meet. A life of imprisonment was truly worse than death, and she became filled with endless hatred. She hissed, "The venerable Daoist will save me! When the time comes, not one of you whores will have a good end! I'll have you kneel and beg me for your lives!"

The disciples looked at each other, not knowing what they should do. After all, she was their martial grandaunt, so no matter how angry they were, it was not appropriate for them to respond.

Huai Bi continued to curse, her words becoming more unpleasant, her endless obscenities of the most insidious nature.

Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu were standing in a pavilion near the cottage. They couldn't help but shake their heads at this sight.

At this moment, Xu Yourong glanced at Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng froze, then glanced at Tang Thirty-Six.

Tang Thirty-Six sighed, "Truly a fine couple of..."

Then, he glanced at Zhexiu.

A chill wind stirred, making the fallen leaves on the pavilion dance without rest.

Zhexiu arrived amongst the flowering trees. There was a zing, and then the Demon Commander Sword flew through the air, shining with a gloomy light.

Huai Bi's venomous curses suddenly stopped. She gripped her bleeding throat, and her eyes filled with disbelief as she slowly collapsed.

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Twilight in the mountains came much faster than it did on the plains.

It was still rather early in the day, but the sun was already near the line sketched out on the horizon by the unbroken mountains. Its light was somewhat dim and the blossoming trees seemed ablaze.

On the mountain path in front of South Stream Temple, Ping Xuan, Yi Chen, and a hundred-some of their direct disciples were sending off their martial grandaunts Huai Ren and Huai Shu. Though rather far away, it was still possible to hear the sounds of sobbing, and the atmosphere was a depressed one of mourning.

"I didn't think that this martial aunt was so powerful."

Chen Changsheng stood at the edge of the cliff, watching that scene in the distance.

Earlier, when Huai Bi launched her sudden attack in the thatched

cottage, she had used the Divine Finger of the Worldstream to seal off Huai Ren's meridians and Ethereal Palace. No one had expected that Huai Ren's personality was many times fiercer than it normally appeared, and her cultivation even more unfathomable. She had forcefully stimulated her true essence and spiritual sense to break her restrictions and easily capture Huai Bi. With just a single move, she had stripped Huai Bi of any ability to fight back.

The Divine Finger of the Worldstream that she used was at a far higher level than Huai Bi's, indescribably profound and tinged with a transcendent aura, even vaguely divine. If she were unwilling to obey Xu Yourong's will and leave, and relied on just her cultivation to resist, it would be very difficult to know just how today would have ended.

"My South Stream Temple has countless years of history. Although unobtrusive, we have extremely deep resources. Martial Aunt Huai Ren has been obsessed with cultivation for her entire life and has hopes of reaching the Divine. It's only natural that she be so formidable."

Xu Yourong added, "But I don't know how they were persuaded by your master."

Chen Changsheng stood at the side. Her petite face, beautiful beyond compare, was incredibly serene, yet also bore an aura of august majesty. Perhaps it was because she held her hands behind her as she stood at the edge of the cliff.

By this point, he was now extremely sure that the ill omen he had sensed at the summit of Holy Maiden Peak yesterday had come from himself.

To put it another way, he was Xu Yourong's greatest problem. If he had not come to Holy Maiden Peak, Xu Yourong might not have been forced to break through the stone wall and end her seclusion in advance.

When he thought of this, he said, "I'm sorry. In the future, I will

act with a cooler head."

Xu Yourong turned and smiled. "If matters involving me couldn't break your cool demeanor, wouldn't that be the appropriate time to apologize to me?"

Chen Changsheng considered this, then agreed. "That's reasonable, so I won't change it then."

It had been several years since their last meeting, and two years since they had exchanged letters. Logically speaking, they should have found each other a little strange.

But in truth, they had experienced life and death together far too many times. Their bloods were mixed, his in her and hers in him.

Just like it was in the eyes of the common people, they were truly a match made in heaven.

They met now with the same calm indifference as in the past.

Xu Yourong closed her eyes, seemingly pondering something.

The wind gently blew on her face, causing her lashes to tremble.

Twilight came with this wind.

Seeing her face, Chen Changsheng felt slightly moved and slowly lowered his head.

Xu Yourong's eyes remained closed, but a subtle shift occurred in her expression.

Perhaps she had sensed something?

Chapter 915 – So Follow Our Hearts to Where They Are Comfortable

Pffft.

This was not the sound of laughter.

Blood burst out from Xu Yourong's lips.

It all fell on Chen Changsheng's body.

Chen Changsheng cut a rather sorry figure.

Xu Yourong opened her eyes and saw this sight. A moment's thought was enough to guess at what had happened.

She used her sleeve to wipe the blood off her lips, revealing a naughty smile.

Chen Changsheng had no mind for himself. Seeing her pale face, he worriedly asked, "Are you okay?"

Xu Yourong knew of his obsession with cleanliness, and seeing him not care about it slightly moved her. Taking out a handkerchief, she carefully wiped the blood off his face.

"With the clotted blood removed, I'm fine."

She faced the twilight and closed her eyes to meditate and treat her injuries, but Chen Changsheng had gotten the wrong impression.

Chen Changsheng felt somewhat embarrassed, but he was even more concerned, even after she said that she was fine.

Entering seclusion was an extremely important matter, but Xu Yourong had broken out of it today because of him. This was certain to have a massive influence on her cultivation.

Crucially, her Dao heart would be covered in an almost unremovable mark, and there was even a high chance that she would never have a chance to break through.

When he thought of this, Chen Changsheng felt even more depressed.

Xu Yourong knew what he was thinking. "Many cultivators who encounter situations like mine will have their Dao hearts sway as soon as they encounter defeat, leaving them with no chance of seeking the Divine. But you don't have to worry about me, because I am more confident than anyone, and I am still very young."

In cultivating the Dao, one cultivated the months and years. As the youngest cultivator in history to see that threshold, she still had many years to comprehend and savor. Most importantly, she was well aware of this fact, ensuring that she would not waste these years, that her Dao heart would not be affected.

Chen Changsheng's mind was somewhat relieved upon hearing this.

The blood on his face had already been wiped off by Xu Yourong, and the remnants she missed were purified by the Phoenix flames born from the evening glow, but there was no way to clean the clothes. He very naturally took a clean set of clothes from the Vault Sheath and turned around to change his clothes. His movements were very practiced, as if he had gone through this process countless times.

Xu Yourong asked, "You usually keep a clean set of clothes with you? Why is it that you change them so proficiently?"

Chen Changsheng recalled the hole that had been punched through the wall of the Orthodox Academy and those eyes on the edge of the wooden basin, the little girl whose face was clearly blushing but was still pretending that she didn't care. He suddenly felt a deep longing, but he didn't dare mention this. He only brought up the matter of the cold pool in the deserted palace that was linked to the underground space beneath New North Bridge.

Xu Yourong had known of the story of New North Bridge since she was a child and was not surprised. She asked, "Just what's

going on with the little Black Dragon?"

She was referring to the murder of Bie Tianxin.

Although everyone knew that this was a scheme of the Great Western Continent, the question lay in the fact that before this scheme was exposed, Chen Changsheng had not agreed to have the little Black Dragon come out and provide evidence. Someone as intelligent as Xu Yourong was naturally able to guess that something had happened to the Black Dragon.

Chen Changsheng replied, "I can't be sure right now, but she shouldn't be in danger."

Xu Yourong asked, "Does anything need to be done?"

Chen Changsheng shook his head. "Let's wait a while first."

Xu Yourong said no more on the subject, instead asking, "Have you had a chance to walk around here?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "I saw the sights you mentioned in your letters, but I haven't had the time to carefully look."

Xu Yourong smiled. "I'll take you around to look?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "Okay."

The wind blew, the trees swayed, the scent of flowers wafted over. The White Crane broke through the twilight and landed in front of them.

With a clear cry, the White Crane took off with the two of them on its back. With incredible speed, it tore through the dusky light, passed through the clouds, and arrived at the summit. Seeing the plains and the Tong River in the twilight, as well as those inky mountain peaks, Chen Changsheng emotionally sighed, "The scenery you described in your letters from when we were little is truly amazing. Not a bit of it was exaggerated."

Xu Yourong forcefully calmed herself. "Did I write you letters when I was little? Perhaps you've remembered wrongly. After all, I

have written quite a few letters to you in the past few years."

Chen Changsheng smiled. "The White Crane still remembers, so how can you forget?"

The White Crane lightly cried out as if agreeing.

A hint of annoyance appeared on Xu Yourong's face. "I don't know how you managed to trick it into trusting you. It doesn't even listen to me anymore."

Chen Changsheng took her hand and sat down on the most prominent rock by the cliff.

"Since I was small, this gray rock was where I liked to meditate and cultivate."

"Yeah, you talked about it in the letter you sent when we were nine."

"Hey, you really did remember wrongly."

"I didn't remember wrongly, because the descriptions of the scenes in your letter match up exactly with what I'm seeing."

"I don't want to talk with you anymore."

"Fine, you said in the letter from three years ago that there are a lot of birds here, so why don't I see any?"

"Do you want to see them? I can have a lot of birds come over to play."

"Is that all birds coming to pay homage to the Phoenix?"

"That's right."

"Then forget it. It's about to be dark, and they all need to rest. There's no need to bother them."

"That's fine too."

"But what about that pheasant?"

Chen Changsheng was naturally referring to that immature

Golden-winged Great Peng from the Garden of Zhou.

"It likes to eat meat, so I sent it to the plains."

"The plains?"

"It's those plains that you gifted me."

"Ah... if we have a chance, let's go and see together."

"See what?"

"If the monsters of the Garden of Zhou like it, they can live there.
We... can also live there."

"....."

"....."

Yesterday, he had rushed here from Fengyang City, his heart fraught with worry. Afterward, he encountered the two major incidents of the closing of South Stream Temple and the murder of Bie Tianxin, as well as the several terrifying battles that followed. Chen Changsheng was already thoroughly exhausted, and drowsiness was gradually beginning to assail him.

He and Xu Yourong sat on the rock by the cliff, leaning on each other, just like in the Garden of Zhou. They were extremely relaxed and comfortable, causing them to quickly close their eyes.

After some time, Xu Yourong suddenly opened her eyes.

She quietly stared at Chen Changsheng's face, apparently wanting to find some other emotion besides exhaustion on his face, but her search turned up nothing.

He was still like in the past, clean from the inside out, not stirring up any dust and free of any distracting thoughts.

"Chen Changsheng, why did you stop replying to my letters after the age of ten?"

Xu Yourong whispered to him.

Chen Changsheng was already asleep, so he could not reply to her

question.

Suddenly, Xu Yourong opened her eyes wide, a curious expression appearing on her face. Then she thought of something, and her face became somewhat nervous.

She looked around.

The birds suddenly ceased their chirping, the beasts lowered their heads, and even the White Crane twisted its neck to gaze at the distant mountains.

Xu Yourong lowered her head and kissed.

Yeah, it tastes like sticky rice cakes. It's not bad.

At this moment, Chen Changsheng opened his eyes.

But he did not break away.

Chapter 916 – The Divine Matters of Eating, Drinking, Man and Woman

From the closest possible distance, Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong looked into each other's eyes, seeing themselves reflected in them.

All was quiet, with not a single noise.

After some time, the two finally parted.

"I'm a little hungry," Xu Yourong said very seriously to him.

Chen Changsheng's voice was somewhat shaky as he asked, "What do you want to eat?"

The White Crane once more soared through the sky, breaking through the clouds and landing in the small village near the Tong River.

Xu Yourong brought him to a very unremarkable residence, where she was ecstatically welcomed by a middle-aged woman.

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong had a craving for the beef ribs of Fortune Peace Road.

The middle-aged woman replied, "I certainly don't know how to cook the food northerners eat, but I just got my hands on three fish today, so why don't I make you two a pot of Fish with Tofu?"

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong exchanged a glance. They didn't expect that what they had regretfully missed back then would be made up for today.

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Tender fish paired with even more tender tofu created a most indescribably delicious texture, and the addition of spicy red sauce made one just want to shout in praise.

Just like in Fortune Peace Road, Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong first dined quietly for a long span of time. Only after their appetites were somewhat satisfied did they begin to chat.

A variety of side dishes were arranged around the fish pot, looking very pretty, so it was rather abrupt when Xu Yourong suddenly added a plate of sticky rice cake.

"It looks like you really do like sweets."

Chen Changsheng recalled the candied dates she had brought with her to the Heaven Lake on Mount Han.

Xu Yourong didn't respond to his words, but her face blushed, perhaps because of the spice or because she was hot.

They engaged in a comprehensive analysis of the events of the last few days.

The Imperial Court's way of thinking was blatantly obvious now, a fact which Chen Changsheng had been mentally prepared to accept for quite some time. However, he was still saddened by the death of Priest Xin.

Priest Xin could be said to have been the earliest witness to the rebirth of the Orthodox Academy from its ruins, but no one could have expected that he had another identity. There was also the matter of the Great Western Continent's scheme. Though it had been exposed, anyone could tell that it wasn't over. Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi had gone to White Emperor City, but it was hard to say how they would end up.

"The White Emperor should have been heavily wounded in his battle with the Demon Lord. He's spent the last few years in seclusion to recover from his injuries, so White Emperor City is essentially in Madam Mu's hands."

Xu Yourong looked at him, making no attempts to conceal her concern, because she knew why the little Black Dragon had gone to White Emperor City.

"When the demi-humans established their country, the Black Frost Dragon tribe contributed a great deal of strength. Zhizhi should be safe there."

Chen Changsheng said, "I'm just a little worried about Senior Bie Yanghong."

Xu Yourong recalled Bie Yanghong's and Wuqiong Bi's desolate figures as they strode into the clouds during the day, and also fell quiet.

The world was still not at peace. Even two experts of the Divine Domain had to encounter such sorrowful matters, so who could possibly remain uninvolved?

And this wasn't even considering that Chen Changsheng was the Pope while Xu Yourong was the Holy Maiden. For the moment, retiring to the plains seemed an impossibility.

Chen Changsheng said, "Now that we're talking about it, the person that I should thank the most for today is Qiushan Jun."

Xu Yourong replied, "Senior Brother is truly an extraordinary person."

She said this with a very calm expression, her tone natural and tinged with a sense of intimacy and trust.

A normal young man would have been rather displeased to hear this.

Chen Changsheng was not an ordinary young man, but he still felt a little uncomfortable.

But there was nothing that he could say, because Qiushan Jun's deed today was truly deserving of his gratitude.

Moreover, in Sloping Cliff Horse Farm, he had personally seen and experienced that Qiushan Jun truly was an extraordinary person.

After hearing the story of Sloping Cliff Horse Farm from Chen

Changsheng, Xu Yourong was rather shocked and speechless, thinking to herself, your and Senior Brother's eyesights are really too simple...

"When I was drinking wine with him by the stream, he mentioned that he likes a girl."

Chen Changsheng glanced at Xu Yourong while he casually said this.

Xu Yourong calmly replied, "You've always had many girls at your side."

This was true.

The earliest was Luoluo leaping over the wall between the Orthodox Academy and the Hundred Herb Garden to implore Chen Changsheng to become her teacher, and then there was the little Black Dragon that saved him with her true blood and later acted as his protector. There was also Mo Yu, that craver of the aroma on his pillow and bedsheets, who would sneak into the Orthodox Academy night after night. And now there was the little Demon Princess Nanke who had her hand perpetually grasping his clothes.

Chen Changsheng didn't know how to explain, so he could only lower his head and eat, intending to take a piece of sticky rice cake.

Xu Yourong did not let him try.

He confusedly asked why.

Xu Yourong was a little ashamed and didn't know how to explain, so she could only put all the sticky rice cakes onto her own plate.

Chen Changsheng thought that she was very angry. He felt that it wasn't easy to explain the rest of those girls, but there was another matter that he could clearly explain.

"When I was ten, I found out that I had an incurable illness and that I wouldn't live past the age of twenty... so I didn't return your letters."

Xu Yourong realized that he hadn't been sleeping earlier and had heard her question loud and clear. She felt even more ashamed and lowered her head in silence.

Chen Changsheng looked at her and very earnestly said, "Don't get angry at me about this."

He and Xu Yourong were of the same age, their birthdays separated by only three days.

When they were six, an engagement had been made between them.

What sort of person was Xu Yourong? At the age of five, she awakened to the blood of the Heavenly Phoenix, and she was personally raised by both the Divine Empress and the Holy Maiden.

Although she had only been six and a half at the time, let alone her grandfather the Grand Minister, even the Divine Empress would have to ask her opinion before marrying her off.

From the day she knew that she was engaged, she became very curious about the other party and sent the White Crane to deliver her letter to Xining.

Upon receiving her letter, Chen Changsheng sent one back, a process that continued until it came to a stop at the age of ten.

They had never been strangers.

But when the letters stopped, Xu Yourong began to hate that little Daoist and became reluctant to remember those times.

Now, the matters from when they were young, like the bamboo dragonfly, could be slowly remembered.

"When you asked me who I was in the first letter, wasn't the tone really terrible?"

"How was it terrible? I was truly very curious."

"But in the last letter, you scolded me quite viciously."

"Who made you not reply to my letters?"

"I didn't want to drag you down, and you didn't actually love me back then."

"Mm, but it really was love."

"What are you saying?"

"I'm saying that from then to now, I've always loved you."

"The same for me."

"Where do you plan to go next?"

"Mount Li."

Xu Yourong's expression turned a little solemn as she inquisitively asked, "You want to find Senior Brother?"

Chen Changsheng pondered this question, then replied, "I want to find a senior brother."

This was a sarcastic remark, and if Xu Yourong were not so intelligent, she would have found it very difficult to so quickly understand it.

She seriously asked, "Then what of White Emperor City?"

Chen Changsheng recalled Zhexiu's current state and said, "Every matter has its own priority. I'll consider other matters after taking care of this one."

Chapter 917 – Where Can the Rushing Blood Settle?

The grand ceremony to close South Stream Temple had come to nothing, but the events that had taken place in it had shaken the entire continent.

The battle between experts of the Divine Domain, the revealing of the Great Western Continent's scheme, and the death of the blue-clothed visitor were hotly discussed topics for the time being.

Holy Maiden Xu Yourong's breaking out of seclusion and then joining with Pope Chen Changsheng to successfully contend against an expert of the Divine Domain drew even more discussion and respect.

The Tang clan, the Qiushan clan, the Mutuo clan, and the Wu clan—all of the Four Great Clans had become extremely subdued, a matter which was inseparably linked to Tang Thirty-Six.

The latest news from the Longevity Sect was a formal apology to the Tang clan, and they had sent an elder to the Tang clan's chief branch to cure the First Master.

But Chusu had vanished.

It was obvious to everyone that the ever-waning Longevity Sect could no longer control this monster.

The Great Zhou Imperial Court remained powerful and Shang Xingzhou remained firmly seated on the world's highest seat.

According to their agreement, Pope Chen Changsheng still could not return to the capital, only travel the world. No one knew when this arrangement would be broken.

But anyone could see that the overarching situation in the world was like the starry sky after a rain, subtly transforming.

After eating the Fish with Tofu, Chen Changsheng had no plans

to lengthen his stay. In the early morning of the next day, he led Tang Thirty-Six and the others out of Holy Maiden Peak.

As for what he and Holy Maiden Xu Yourong had talked about and done in South Stream Temple on that night, there was naturally nobody that knew.

On the upper reaches of the Tong River, the mountains and forests, whether under the sun or in the clouds, all had their distinctive types of beauty.

Spirit Camphor Mountain, the mountain upon which Gentle Stream Monastery was built, had many fragrant camphor trees, and the lush green canopy was very pleasing to the eye.

As one walked through Spirit Camphor Mountain, after around ten-some li, one would reach a cliff. Beyond this cliff was a sea of clouds, making it difficult to see the bottom. Beyond this gap, one could faintly make out a solitary peak, and spanning the gap was a chain that swayed in the wind. Just looking at it made one's heart beat in fear, let alone walking on it.

"What's the name of the mountain?" Tang Thirty-Six asked, pointing across.

Ye Xiaolian had been the one to send them here, so she explained, "This peak is called Incomparable Peak and it is the easternmost of Mount Li's thirty-six mountains. In the past, Senior Brother Qiushan would often practice the sword on this mountain. Occasionally, when the clouds cleared up and the light was good, you could stand here and get a clear view."

Tang Thirty-Six heard the emotion in her voice and teased, "You saw it when you were little and fell in love with Qiushan Jun at first sight?"

Quite a few years ago, on the Divine Avenue of the Li Palace, he and Ye Xiaolian had engaged in an infamous quarrel, so he was naturally aware of the affection she had.

Ye Xiaolian had long since ceased to be that girl from the Divine Avenue and was not at all annoyed by his question. She calmly replied, "So what?"

Tang Thirty-Six got closer to her and whispered, "If I might so boldly ask, who do you like now?"

Ye Xiaolian noticed the nigh imperceptible glance from Chen Changsheng and smiled. "I love the temple master most."

Tang Thirty-Six found this answer quite boring. "Women are truly fickle."

Listening on the side, Zhexiu found this conversation rather boring. He walked to the edge of the cliff, finding the chain swaying in the wind rather interesting.

The solitary peak before them loomed out of the clouds.

Chen Changsheng was looking in its direction, but his mind was somewhere else.

Hu Thirty-Two knew what he was worried about and whispered, "There's still been no news from White Emperor City."

Chen Changsheng asked, "Even if Zhizhi can't be found, why is it that no one can get in touch with Guardian Jin?"

Hu Thirty-Two explained, "The abruptness of this matter meant that many details were left out of the report, but this subordinate remembers from a report he saw two years ago that Guardian Jin has been demoted again. At present, he has returned to farming on the outskirts of White Emperor City. Even if we manage to get in touch with him, he might not be able to resolve this problem."

Chen Changsheng said nothing.

After the night in the snowy mountains, he spent a period of time recovering from his injuries at Sloping Cliff Horse Farm. At that time, he had already reestablished communication with Zhizhi.

While he went from the Mount Song Army headquarters to

Wenshui City, Zhizhi went by herself to White Emperor City, eighty thousand li away.

The Orthodoxy and the Imperial Court were fighting for the world. In order to fight his master Shang Xingzhou, he first had to consider each of their external allies.

His choices to visit the Wenshui Tangs, Holy Maiden Peak, and his next destination were all made with this thought in mind.

Zhizhi also had a most important role to play in this matter.

To the Orthodoxy and the Imperial Court, who was the most important external ally?

It was not the Four Great Clans led by the Tang clan, the sects of the south, or Holy Maiden Peak. It was the Demi-human race.

From a certain perspective, the stance of White Emperor City could decide many things.

Madam Mu's stance was already extremely clear. He could only hope that Zhizhi, with her tribe's deep-rooted relationship with White Emperor City, could stall Madam Mu for a while.

Logically speaking, even if Madam Mu was a participant in the Great Western Continent's scheme and stood on Shang Xingzhou's side, Zhizhi was safe in White Emperor City.

But he was now feeling an inexplicable unease.

Perhaps it was because the soul connection he and Zhizhi shared had been severed.

Perhaps it was because the Orthodoxy's people could not get in touch with Jin Yulu.

Or perhaps it was because it had been many years since he had heard any news of that fellow.

Just where have you been these past few years? What have you been doing?

Tang Thirty-Six walked up to him and soothed, "There's no need to worry. That bear cub has a thick skin, so he'll be okay. The worst he'll suffer is a little pain."

Zhexiu recalled that bear cub that would slam into trees with his back every day and hide away food, and, in a rare sight, the hard lines on his face somewhat softened.

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "Where are we going next?"

Chen Changsheng pointed across and said, "Mount Li."

The solitary mountain in the clouds was Mount Li.

On the northernmost tip of the Luomei Mountains, adjacent to the most fertile fields of the human world, were thirty-six mountains, a sharp sword aimed at the north.

Those mountains were Mount Li.

Tang Thirty-Six turned slightly apprehensive. "We're really going? We don't have the time right now."

Chen Changsheng glanced at Zhexiu and thought, there truly isn't much time.

Suddenly, a quaking could be felt on the edge of the cliff.

This was an intense quake. The clouds beyond the cliff jolted into threads that slowly dispersed.

The chain became much clearer to see, even the rust on its surface becoming visible.

Another quake soon followed. Dust jolted off the ground and began to slowly drift in the air.

Where were these quakes coming from?

Tang Thirty-Six's expression turned grave.

Chen Changsheng was somewhat nervous.

They were all looking at Zhexiu.

The quakes came from Zhexiu's body.

It was like a tide, like thunder.

Zhexiu's complexion was abnormally pale, like he had just been severely wounded.

There were clearly problems in White Emperor City, but Chen Changsheng still wanted to go to Mount Li. This decision had not been made on a sudden impulse.

It was because Zhexiu's Tide Rush of Blood was bursting out more frequently, his illness getting worse and worse.

"There's no need to be worried. I can still survive for ten days to half a month."

Zhexiu had made an extremely rare joke.

But no one was laughing.

Chapter 918 – Speaking of the Past in White Emperor City

In the distant western region of the continent was a beautiful yet dangerous world. This world had countless mountains that were capped with snow in all four seasons. It had countless great rivers and countless primordial forests, and in both the bottom of these waters and the depths of these forests, one would find an uncountable number of fierce beasts. This world was what was known to the common people as the land of the demi-humans.

Deep within the land of the demi-humans stood a most grand and wondrous metropolis. It towered amongst the mountains and was circled by the eight hundred li of the Red River. Its walls were built of glossy white stone, and when paired with the clouds that wrapped around it year-round, it presented an indescribably magnificent sight from the distance, inspiring reverence and fear. This grand metropolis did not have the capital's Imperial Design, nor did it have the underground array of the Li Palace. When defending against foreign enemies, it relied on its sturdy walls and the unflinching will and violent temperaments of the demi-humans.

This was the legendary White Emperor City.

It was said that countless years ago, when the Heavenly Tome Monoliths descended on the Eastern Continent and the Human race began to develop intelligence, the demi-humans were also enlightened, developing their own culture. However, because they were somewhat farther from the Mausoleum of Books, their culture advanced at a slower pace than the Human race. Some demi-humans who lived in the wilderness were even now still rather savage.

Before the founding of their country, the Demi-human race had not had a very pleasant experience on the continent on account of

their simple natures, suffering terrible discrimination and oppression from the Demon race. The nearly extinct Elves were physical proof of this tragic period of history. Moreover, the role the Human race played in this period of history was certainly not glorious.

Finally, more than a thousand years ago, for the sake of resisting the unspeakably cruel Demon race that was growing stronger by the day, several generations of great leaders from both the Demi-human and Human race spent a great deal of patience and wisdom to finally convince both sides to cast aside their grudges and join hands. This ultimately resulted in the formation of an alliance during Emperor Taizong's reign.

After many years, the hatred between the demi-humans and humans gradually began to fade. However, because of that long-ago period of history and the irreconcilable differences between the two races, they still regarded each other with some hostility and wariness. For example, in the recent war, the human army had fought against the demons on the snowy plain for a whole two years, yet the demi-humans had done nothing other than move two tribes a thousand-some li to the east.

This point had already garnered much discussion in the capital. The ministers and generals of the Human race were worried that the Demi-human race might have other ideas, but the most esteemed Shang Xingzhou remained calm. He had a deep trust in his assessment of the situation, as he believed that he had a deep understanding of Madam Mu's desires.

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"In truth, I myself do not understand just what it is I want.

"The identities we live in end up being the roles we play, whether it's princess, empress, wife, or mother.

"But as we act longer and longer, playing more and more roles, we often forget just who we are.

"If you can't even be sure of what role you're playing, how can you determine what it is you want? If we want to get clear and truthful answer, we have to look back at where we came from, reverse time to where it all began. We have to remember what we first saw when we opened our eyes to this world.

"At the time, I was hugging my father, standing on the shore. The mighty waves were like a turbulent sea of ink, and in it was a dancing white dot. It was very beautiful.

"What about you?"

The eight hundred li of the Red River circled White Emperor City, irrigating the plains on both sides. Countless tribes lived within the lush forests.

In the depths of an extremely well-concealed cliff was a small building that seemed one with the earth.

In front of this building was a meadow, and beneath the meadow was a steep cliff. In the distance was the surging Red River and a magnificent city in the clouds.

A woman stood at the edge of the cliff, gazing at the red river and white city as she slowly spoke in an indifferent tone.

A girl dressed in black stood behind her, a chain tied to her ankles. The other end of this chain extended deep into the ground. Of course, it was the little Black Dragon, Zhizhi.

She looked at the woman's back and very naturally recalled the person she most feared, the Tianhai Divine Empress.

Perhaps it was because this woman also seemed eminent and unapproachable, or perhaps it was because she also had a habit of holding her hands behind her back.

There was only one woman in the present world that could be

compared to the Tianhai Divine Empress: Madam Mu, Empress of White Emperor City.

The little Black Dragon seriously considered Madam Mu's question and replied, "I saw a pearl."

She spread her arms out in the air. "It was a pearl about this large."

If she was not exaggerating, then this pearl's size was truly rather absurd.

The little Black Dragon said, "Mother told me that when I was born, I loved to cry, and I wouldn't stop no matter how much they tried to amuse me. It was only when I hugged this pearl that I would be quiet."

Madam Mu asked, "Presumably, it was the legendary Mermaid's Tear?"

The Dragon race inhabited a region in the distant reaches of the Southern Sea. The Great Western Continent was also an ocean-faring country, so the two had similar legends and the pair could understand each other somewhat.

The Black Dragon added, "Later on, at New North Bridge, Scholar Wang took it away."

Madam Mu said, "Only knowing how to bully a little child like you, Lord Wang can't be considered much of a hero."

The little Black Dragon approved of these words, saying with an innocent expression, "Empress is an extraordinary person, so don't bully a little child like me."

Madam Mu denied, "I'm no hero, only a woman."

Feeling wronged, the Black Dragon asked, "Then how long does Empress plan to jail me?"

Madam Mu replied, "I am not Lord Wang, nor am I Tianhai. I have no interest in imprisoning you."

The Black Dragon fell quiet for a while, then asked, "Then when do you intend to kill me?"

"The Demi-human race was able to establish this country solely because of your Black Frost Dragon tribe. If I do not want to earn the contempt of the entire Demi-human race, I will not kill you."

Madam Mu gazed at the massive white city on the other shore of the Red River and calmly said, "Moreover, although you have not fully recovered your strength, you are still not easy to kill. If not for the fact that your soul had been pulled out once, I would have found it very difficult to silently capture you."

Upon hearing this, the little Black Dragon recalled those scenes from New North Bridge, especially the pain from when the Tianhai Divine Empress pulled out her soul, causing her face to turn pale. And when she remembered the pain from when her Deep Freeze Dragon Breath had been extracted out of her body by this woman a few days ago, her vertical pupils constricted, a hint of loathing flashing through them.

She stared at Madam Mu and asked, "Just what do you want to do?"

Madam Mu did not turn around as she softly said, "I should be the one asking you this question. In the battle in the mountains, His Majesty the Demon Lord would naturally spare you out of respect for his friendship with your father, but you decided to fake your death and sneak into White Emperor City. Just what did Chen Changsheng want you to do?"

The little Black Dragon said nothing.

She had received Chen Changsheng's order and come to White Emperor City primarily to meet the White Emperor, but the White Emperor was in seclusion to recover from his injuries. As a result, she could only think of a way to meet Luoluo, but before she could enter the palace, she realized that something was wrong. By the time she was preparing to leave, it was too late, and she ended up

being captured by Madam Mu.

Chen Changsheng had explicitly stated that whether she met the White Emperor or Luoluo, she had to hide it from Madam Mu. Anyone could see the problem between the Imperial Court, the Orthodoxy, and White Emperor City, but she had not expected Madam Mu's stance to be so unyielding. Just the silent agreement between her and Shang Xingzhou was far from enough to explain such a stance.

She suddenly thought of a possibility, and said in a somewhat low voice, "Could it be that the people of the Great Western Continent want to stir a storm on this continent?"

Madam Mu faintly smiled. "We've been preparing for centuries. Is just one storm enough?"

Her speculations had been confirmed, causing the little Black Dragon to fall into a long period of silent thought. Finally, she said, "Have none of you realized the true reason for Mu Jiushi's exile from the Li Palace? The Pope has always been wary of you. There are still many more people that are wary of you, have not forgotten you."

Madam Mu slowly turned around, her smile slightly fading. "And so what?"

The Black Dragon stared into her eyes and answered, "I don't know what you're scheming, but I know that someone died yesterday while Chen Changsheng is still alive."

Millions upon millions of people lived on the continent. Many people were dying in every moment for various reasons.

Just the death of a normal person naturally would not draw her attention, much less be brought up.

Experts of the Divine Domain shared a sort of spiritual connection. Although her cultivation had suffered a severe decline, she had not lost this connection.

She had clearly sensed that an expert of the Divine Domain had returned to the sea of stars yesterday.

She was unaware that this expert of the Divine Domain was the Imperial Uncle of the Great Western Continent.

But Madam Mu did know, and the last hints of a smile evaporated into nothing.

Chapter 919 – Seeing an Old Friend in a Small Tavern

Madam Mu's eyes became incredibly deep and serene, and one had the sense that in the very bottom of the sea, a whale as massive as a mountain was slowly swimming, and this whale was just about to shake its tail and stir up a furious wave that would shock the heavens.

Suddenly, she closed her eyes. When she opened them again, they were devoid of anger, containing only a fear-inducing serenity.

It was still the bottom of the sea. Though there were no furious waves, there was a massive pressure that no ordinary person could endure.

"Back then, when I opened my eyes and saw that little white dot on those terrifying waves, I thought that it was a seagull that represented a life of freedom."

She fell quiet for a while, then continued, "Many years later, I still thought the same, even when I was exiled from the Great Western Continent by Imperial Uncle, so I didn't feel dejected. On the contrary, this was the fulfillment of my desires, and yet it was on that very same day that I learned that the little white dot I saw all those years ago was not a seagull, but a sail.

"Zhou Dufu had come alone on a boat but returned out of boredom. It was when I learned the truth of this story that I understood that my life had never been one of freedom. The white sail symbolized coming and going, meant that we had to return to our homeland, that this was my life's true calling."

The little Black Dragon did not understand what Madam Mu meant by these words.

Madam Mu did not continue to explain her thinking, but took

her leave of this cliff.

Countless years ago, the Imperial Uncle had found an excuse to exile her from the Great Western Continent, beginning her travels on this continent. She had gotten to know many outstanding individuals and ultimately become the Empress of the Demi-human race.

Relying on her intelligence and skills, she gained the White Emperor's trust and love, gained the Tianhai Divine Empress's trust and friendship. However, in the momentous battle between the White Emperor and the Demon Lord on the snowy plains to the north of Mount Han in which both sides walked away heavily wounded, the long-concealed Shang Xingzhou unexpectedly appeared.

Her judgment of the situation remained correct. Without hesitation, she chose to stand at Shang Xingzhou's side, obtaining a promise from him.

Just when the situation was gradually falling under control, and the grand undertaking of many years was on the verge of success, the Imperial Uncle who she had trusted, even idolized, since she was a child suddenly died.

The events on the plateau of Holy Maiden Peak had already reached her ears.

The Great Western Continent's scheme had been exposed and many people were now looking towards White Emperor City, looking at her. Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi might even have already arrived.

Logically speaking, she should have been very nervous, or at least somewhat discomfited. But she was not. Just like in the past, she was calm, easygoing, confident.

The white sail flapped in the wind, particularly striking in the turbid red waters.

The great ship broke through the waves, landing at the opposite shore.

She ascended the stone steps, up to the Imperial Palace at the very top.

The several thousand demi-human officers and soldiers lining the steps bowed as she ascended.

On the nearby streets, the countless demi-human commoners also kneeled on the ground, all sorts of greetings and well-wishes coming from their mouths.

When she reached the Imperial Palace, she lightly caressed her belly through her sleeves.

And then she turned around, looking down upon this metropolis of white, a confident smile on her apathetic face.

This was her city.

Even if Bie Yanghong and his wife, Chen Changsheng and the Orthodoxy's Prefects, and Wang Po came together, they would all die.

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The laws of the demi-humans were very simple, consisting of only seventeen pages.

On the first page, it was written very clearly: White Emperor City belongs to the White Emperor.

The second page gave a pretty supplement: White Emperor City also belongs to every demi-human that lives within it.

In reality, while the first page had been thoroughly enforced for innumerable years, the words on the second page continued to exist only on paper.

To the demi-human commoners, it was the glory of the Demi-

human race that made them proud to live in White Emperor City, but to become the true master of White Emperor City? That existed only in the imagination, if one even dared to imagine it, which wasn't possible unless they were already thoroughly inebriated.

Perhaps for this reason, or maybe just because of their personality, the vast majority of demi-humans liked to drink, with a particular preference for hard alcohol.

The riverside district of White Emperor City's outer city was full of all sorts of small taverns. These taverns sold cheap but strong alcohol and terrible-tasting but incredibly expensive food. They plundered the money from the lower-class citizens and from the youths that came to sell the goods from their tribes.

Places like these were shrouded in the stench of animal hide, feet, and vomit, and naturally smelled horrific. If not for the fact that the proximity of these taverns to the river met that the health bureau could send people every day to engage in a rough washing of the streets, the smell would have been so bad that not even the tribal hunters would have been able to endure it.

A certain ordinary little tavern by the river was just as raucous as its fellow taverns, its back door just as cheerless and deserted. A small mountain of bowls and cups were piled up here, and this tavern's only difference from its compatriots was the giant figure crouched next to this pile, washing the dishes in front of a tub.

This mountain of a man had his head lowered as he silently washed the bowls, as if the noisy world behind him had no connection with him.

The tavern's back door creaked as it was pushed upon, and two drunk patrons staggered out. Seemingly not seeing the dishwasher, they untied their pants and began to piss. The dishwasher hurriedly moved the tub a little farther, at the same time chiding the two drunkards.

The pair finally took note of the dishwasher's existence, one of them cursing, "Are you blind! Quickly move a little farther!"

His companion was a little less drunk. Patting him on the shoulder, he pointed at the dishwashing man and gave a whispered explanation. The cursing drunkard sobered up a little and broke into hearty laughter. "Oh my, this is the legendary bear cub?"

His companion chuckled and indicated that they should quickly finish their business and get back to drinking. His fellow drunkard gave a few taunts before taking his leave.

The dishwashing man took a large jar of water and cleaned the wall. After shaking his head, he continued to wash the dishes.

It was plain to see that he was very skilled at washing dishes. The mountain of plates in the tub danced in his seemingly clumsy hands and was swiftly cleaned. He moved the clean bowls and plates into the tavern's rear kitchen. Just when he was prepared to clean the stove, the owner called him over. Apparently, business was too good today and it was too busy at the front, so he needed to help serve alcohol.

When he arrived in the drinking area, the raucous conversation suddenly came to a halt, and everyone's eyes fixated on him.

The light in the tavern was rather dusky, but it was enough to see his face. Although this stalwart man had a bearded face, his eyes were bright and clean, clear evidence of his young age. When one considered the rumor that the Bear tribe were forthright and old-fashioned, this person was probably still a youth.

The sudden hush in the tavern had been caused by the arm strength exhibited by this bear youth.

Twelve pots of hard alcohol hung off his left arm like ripe fruits. They seemed very steady, not shaking in the slightest.

"He really does deserve his reputation as the most outstanding young hunter of the Bear tribe from back then. This is truly some

impressive strength."

"He's Xuanyuan Po?"

Yes, he was Xuanyuan Po.

The bear youth in this tavern by the river was Xuanyuan Po.

After five years, his simple and honest self seemed to be doing the same job.

The entire continent had cleanly forgotten the name of Xuanyuan Po by now, but to the frequent patrons of this tavern and the surrounding businesses, this was a rather famous name, as he had once gone to the capital. To the demi-human tribes, the human world was incomparably distant, and anyone who went had the right to boast.

The drunkard who had gone out back to piss laughed and said, "Isn't he a cripple?"

With these words, many gazes fell upon Xuanyuan Po's right arm.

Xuanyuan Po's left arm was as thick as a tree trunk, but for some reason, his right arm was rather withered, looking like the branch of a dead tree.

The difference between the two arms was quite stark, making the overall picture all the more tragic.

Chapter 920 – Knowing Her Highness Through Watching Her Food

A few patrons who knew of Xuanyuan Po's experiences in the capital gave a few whispered explanations, upon which the rest of the patrons came to know that Xuanyuan Po's right arm had been injured once and had seemingly been crippled.

"Do you really believe the boasts of a cripple like this? And an expert of the Tianhai clan... He might as well just say it was Tianhai Shengxue!"

The drunkard, smelling of alcohol, called out, then spat in front of Xuanyuan Po's feet.

Xuanyuan Po remained silent, not speaking, much less countering. He used his right hand to arduously take the wine pots from his left arm and place them on the tables.

The drunkard was incensed at the fact that he was being ignored. He continued to curse, his words becoming more and more unpleasant.

Several patrons began to follow suit, aiming all sorts of jeers and taunts at Xuanyuan Po.

Xuanyuan Po continued to ignore them. After delivering the wine pots, he turned and prepared to go back.

The drunkard suddenly stood up and called out, "Hey, bear cub, stop right there."

Xuanyuan Po stopped and looked over.

The drunkard belched and mumbled out, "Did you really go to the capital?"

Xuanyuan Po nodded.

The drunkard asked, "You're really schoolmates with His

Holiness the Pope?"

Xuanyuan Po pondered this question, then corrected, "At the very start, we were both students, but later on, he became principal while I became a supervisor."

The drunkard roared with laughter, as did many of his fellows. They felt this response to truly be too absurd.

The drunkard pointed at Xuanyuan Po's right arm and jeered, "Just look at his arm. This is a cripple without a single bit of strength, only good for washing dishes. And he has the nerve to say that he was a supervisor of the Orthodox Academy? That's the Orthodox Academy we're talking about here!? If you have that capability, what are you doing washing dishes here?"

The capital of the Great Zhou was simply too far away from the world of the demi-humans, so the specific details of the events taking place there would rarely reach the small taverns of White Emperor City, but any patron of any tavern, no matter how drunk, would know of the Orthodox Academy.

Their most beloved and worshipped princess had once been a student of the Orthodox Academy, and her teacher was the current Pope.

If Xuanyuan Po really had stayed in the Orthodox Academy and had even been a supervisor, how could he be washing dishes in a filthy little tavern like this?

Several patrons seated around a corner table creased their brows and glanced at each other, quite confused. These people were low-level enforcers working for trading companies and had once accompanied a caravan to the capital. They knew that Xuanyuan Po wasn't lying, but they also didn't know why he was in his current situation.

"His Holiness the Pope hasn't appeared once since he's left the capital. He might not even have time to take care of himself, so

how can he worry about this guy?"

"What about Her Highness?"

"It is a matter from quite a few years ago, and how can a noble remember something from so long ago? Besides... I heard that Xuanyuan Po left the capital before the coup of the Mausoleum of Books. Based on the time he left, he probably saw the way the wind was blowing and ran away, so how can he still have the face to see Her Highness?"

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The owner of the tavern saw the crowd getting rowdier and rowdier, so he harshly reprimanded Xuanyuan Po and sent him back into the kitchen.

Xuanyuan Po didn't have much of a response. He took another tub of dirty dishes to the back and continued to silently wash them.

In these past three years, he had been jeered at and cursed as a cripple countless times, but he had never once cared. It wasn't because he had grown numb, nor was it because of his wooden personality. It was because he knew that he wasn't a cripple, nor did he feel like he had fallen into disgrace.

When his right arm had been crippled by Tianhai Ya'er, he had withdrawn from Star Seizer Academy on his own volition and taken a job in the capital's night market washing dishes. All he was doing now was taking up his old profession.

He remembered very clearly that Chen Changsheng had said that there was no shame in working to make money, but rather a matter of great honor.

And it wasn't because he felt too ashamed from leaving the Orthodox Academy before the coup of the Mausoleum of Books that he did not see acquaintances like Princess Luoluo from the

Orthodox Academy.

After leaving the Orthodox Academy, he had needed only seventeen days to return to White Emperor City. The eighty-thousand- li journey had consumed his body, his sturdy figure turning into a bamboo pole. He naturally hadn't been escaping. He knew that Chen Changsheng was on the verge of death, so he wanted to seek aid for him.

To his surprise, even with the seal that Princess Luoluo had left behind, he was still unable to enter the Imperial Palace. In the early morning of the next day, he went to the mountain slope outside White Emperor City to seek Jin Yulu's help but discovered that this great demi-human general's estate had been surrounded by guards from the Imperial Palace with many spies hiding in the forest.

There was nothing Xuanyuan Po could do. Fortunately, it was not long after that he heard about what had taken place in the capital.

The Tianhai Divine Empress had died, but Chen Changsheng was not dead. The Orthodox Academy was still there and Chen Changsheng had even become Pope. Afterward, Chen Changsheng left the capital, upon which no more news was heard of him.

Xuanyuan Po had the option of returning to the capital's Orthodox Academy or to his own tribe, both of them excellent choices.

But he chose to remain in White Emperor City.

Because it was clear that something had happened.

He still had not managed to meet the Princess or Jin Yulu.

Just like this, he quietly lived in White Emperor City for three years, gradually becoming the target of jeering, gradually being forgotten.

But he had not forgotten what he had come to do.

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At midnight, the tavern finally emptied out.

Xuanyuan Po finished his hard labor and used cold water to clean his body. After changing into a clean set of clothes, he walked to an alley at the back of the Imperial Palace. He called out to one of the food attendants that he was familiar with and began his other job: delivering food to the Imperial Palace.

The Imperial Palace was naturally under heavy guard, and he couldn't enter the palace, only deliver the food up to the perimeter.

Xuanyuan Po had not saved up the vast sum of money needed to bribe the guards, nor was he clever enough to curry favor with a noble, so it was naturally impossible for him to know any accurate news from the palace. However, he could use a rather stupid method to reach his goal, just like he had done for the last two years.

The department for procuring foods would draw up a list of foods they needed each day. Every day, he would seriously review this list three times and then go back to his home and copy it down.

He had a clear understanding of the foods Princess Luoluo loved. Those foods often originated from the distant human world and starkly stood out on the lists of food.

He could remember these foods so clearly because he was the logistics supervisor of the Orthodox Academy. From the very start, he had been the one making the Orthodox Academy's food.

Through these lists of food, he could tell whether Princess Luoluo was still in the palace or not, how her health was, and what mood she was in.

Yes, this was precisely the reason he had remained in White Emperor City.

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As usual, Xuanyuan Po finished reading the list of foods and how much was being requested. He confirmed that Princess Luoluo was fine, but he still creased his brow.

Potherb mustard were at their crispest in the late winter, and a little less than half a box had been sent into the palace the day before yesterday. It was Princess Luoluo's favorite food, whether it was stir-fried or boiled in soup. Logically speaking, more should have been delivered today, so why didn't he see any?

Was Princess Luoluo in a bad mood? Had something happened?

Just when Xuanyuan Po was prepared to make a few risky inquiries, the news was sent out from the Imperial Palace, quickly spreading throughout White Emperor City. Presumably, it would not take long for this news to be known throughout the continent, as it was obvious that some important figure had intentionally released this news.

Princess Luoluo was going to be married off.

Chapter 921 – Rain Will Fall Today, So It Is Forbidden to Be Married Off

According to the rules of the White Emperor clan and the tradition of the Demi-human race, one did not have the right to inherit the throne unless they had cultivated the Imperial clan's technique to its highest level.

No exception had existed over the countless years, and there had never been a demi-human princess able to cultivate the Imperial clan's techniques to the pinnacle.

If there were no princes, the Imperial clan would have to invite a groom. The son-in-law would be inducted as a prince by blood, and once they cultivated the Imperial clan's techniques to the peak, they would become the heir to the imperial throne of the Demi-human race.

Princess Luoluo being married was completely understandable to many demi-human subjects. The true question was who she was being married off to.

Because the man she chose was highly likely to be the next White Emperor.

Xuanyuan Po didn't see it this way.

Just like Princess Luoluo, he was also a student of the Orthodox Academy, also one of Chen Changsheng's patients.

He knew more than anyone else that the problem with Princess Luoluo's meridians had been cured by Chen Changsheng ages ago. As long as she was given sufficient time, she could assuredly cultivate the Imperial clan's techniques to the peak. When that time came, she would unquestionably be the next White Emperor, so why was there a need to invite a groom?

Fine, even if Princess Luoluo did become the next White Emperor, she still needed to marry.

Xuanyuan Po sat on a rock by the Red River. Suddenly, he felt a little moisture on his face.

Drops of rain had come with the morning wind.

Rain was falling from the sky and the princess was going to be married off. These were all matters of nature. (TN: 'Rain will fall from the sky, the mother/girl will be married off' is a common saying in Chinese that is used to indicate that some events are inevitable and cannot be stopped.)

So why was he so sad?

It naturally wasn't because he had some hidden love for the princess.

He was a member of the Orthodox Academy and the princess was the Vice Principal of the Orthodox Academy. He had the duty of protecting her.

He knew that the princess had no desire to be married off to someone else.

If something happened to her, how could he face Chen Changsheng?

Just how badly would Zhexiu would look down on him?

Would Su Moyu cross his name off the register?

And there was also... Tang Thirty-Six's mouth.

Xuanyuan Po felt a shiver of fear, his face turning pale.

"Your Highness, I won't let you be married off!"

He smashed his fist on the rock beside him.

His right arm was severely withered and seemingly devoid of strength. The only effect was a thump from the moss-covered rock.

Only careful observation would reveal that, beneath his sleeve, countless tiny arcs of lightning were curling around his arm.

Xuanyuan Po left the Red River.

One hour later...

A boom of thunder exploded over the Red River.

A downpour suddenly intensified.

The rock on the shore split down the middle and rumbled into the river.

The moss on the rock had all been charred to death.

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It had already been four years since she had returned from the capital to White Emperor City.

Luoluo lived a very normal life.

Just like when she was small, she lived a life of luxury, spent in studying, cultivating, the four arts of zither, chess, calligraphy and painting, climbing high and gazing far.

Other than her concern for Chen Changsheng and her old friends in the Orthodox Academy, nothing else disturbed her mood.

Her smile was still sweet, her eyes so quick-witted that they seemed like they could speak.

Today, Princess Luoluo was studying the Law Sword of the Mount Li Sword Style.

In the last several years, Chen Changsheng had only written her one letter, but it had been a very long one, dense with words.

In that letter, Chen Changsheng had arranged in detail her homework for the next five years.

In this aspect, although Chen Changsheng could not be considered a particularly well-qualified teacher, he also could not be said to have put no thought into it.

As for why he had chosen the Mount Li Sword Style, it was because this was the sword style he knew best, and the manual for

this sword style just so happened to be in Luoluo's hands.

Morning wind, speckled with drops of rain, fell on the window. Luoluo shifted her gaze from the sword manual to the window, into the rain-soaked distance.

In the last four years, she had studied very diligently, not letting a single second go to waste.

As long as she could master the Law Sword of the Mount Li Sword Sect, the homework Chen Changsheng had arranged for her would be finished.

She had finished the lesson plan in that letter an entire year in advance.

If I finish learning this, will Teacher come to see me? At the very least... he should write me another, arranging for me a new lesson plan.

Luoluo silently thought, then tidied her thoughts and continued to study the sword manual.

Guardian Li gave her an affectionate gaze, tinged with both pride and heartache.

The raindrops lightly beat against the window, and the sounds of kneeling and footsteps could be heard.

Luoluo froze for a second, glanced up, then let out a happy shout as she ran over.

She hugged Madam Mu's leg, lightly shaking her head and sweetly smiling. It appeared a little like she was whining, but her attitude was more one of yearning and intimacy.

Madam Mu faintly smiled as she caressed her daughter's face and asked if she was doing well.

After some idle chatter, Luoluo began to ask for assistance on a few questions concerning cultivation, which Madam Mu earnestly answered.

Time slowly passed.

Madam Mu left.

Luoluo gazed in the direction she had vanished, her smile slowly fading, supplanted by an inexplicable grief.

"It's truly been confirmed?"

"Yes, the news has already spread through the city... The source should be the Imperial Guard of the Abyssal Pearl Pavilion."

Luoluo's grief originated from the fact that Madam Mu had said nothing of this.

She looked to Guardian Li and asked in slight anticipation, "Is there any chance that Father will come out of his seclusion within half a year?"

Guardian Li whispered, "Probably not."

In the heaven-shaking battle between the White Emperor and the Demon Lord north of Mount Han, both sides had walked away critically wounded.

The Demon Lord had been forced off the throne by Black Robe and the Demon Commander, struck into the abyss. In the end, his own son killed him in the snowy mountains using the Astral Executioner.

The White Emperor had received similarly serious injuries, and he had also become enlightened by that battle. Upon returning to White Emperor City, he entered seclusion to cultivate, hoping to both heal his injuries and advance another step.

It had now been five years since this most exalted and tyrannical demi-human had appeared.

Luoluo gazed at the bold and forceful strokes of the sword manual in silence, then asked, "What of Guardian Jin?"

"He's still being heavily guarded. It will be difficult to get in touch with him without being discovered."

Guardian Li hesitated for a moment, then added, "Even if we did communicate with Guardian Jin, he wouldn't be able to do anything."

"Reasonable."

Luoluo asked, "Is Xuanyuan Po still in that small tavern?"

Upon hearing Xuanyuan Po's name, Guardian Li couldn't help but show a faint smile. "And he still goes to the palace every day to look at the food list."

Luoluo smiled and ordered, "Send someone to keep an eye on him. If he plans to do anything, knock him out and send him back to the capital."

Guardian Li assented but couldn't restrain a sigh.

Luoluo had a most revered status, but now, when her mother intended to control her, she could not find a single helper.

The only person that could help her was that bear youth, but she could not stand to see him die because of her.

"Does Madam know what I am most afraid of?" Luoluo said in a soft voice.

Guardian Li appeared slightly startled.

Luoluo fell quiet, then said, "What I'm most afraid of is that Mother is seemingly not afraid that she will anger Father with her actions."

This was a question that had also confused Guardian Li.

"If Mother is not worried, there are only two possibilities. One possibility is that their several centuries of love was faked and that Mother means to harm Father. The other, more terrifying, conjecture is that Father also knows of this matter."

As she said this, Luoluo had a rather perplexed expression, appearing extremely small and helpless.

Guardian Li finally couldn't help but ask, "Your Highness, why don't we send a letter to the humans?"

Chapter 922 – The Reason Young People Live

By 'letter to the humans', Guardian Li was naturally saying that they should send a letter to Chen Changsheng.

Guardian Li believed that given the teacher-student relationship between the Pope and the princess, as long as Chen Changsheng knew of this marriage, he would find a way to resolve it. Whether it was a personally written letter or some other method, he could place significant pressure on the Empress, making her think a little before acting. However, for some reason, Princess Luoluo had never agreed. If this were three years ago, one could say that the Pope was too difficult to find, but the entire continent now knew that the Pope had begun to involve himself in the continent's affairs once more and had even taken part in many momentous events.

"Teacher... it's hard to say whether he's had a good time these last few years."

Luoluo softly added, "He still has many things that he needs to do. I'm not able to help him as his student, nor can I add to his troubles."

Guardian Li was somewhat anxious. "How is this adding to his troubles? And besides, back in the capital..."

Luoluo knew what she wanted to say and shook her head. "Back in the capital, from the Grand Examination to the Mausoleum of Books to the Garden of Zhou, you and I seemed like the Orthodox Academy's greatest backer, but in reality, the limitations of my status meant that we could never provide any strength. Moreover, just like now, Teacher never requested anything of me."

Guardian Li was somewhat perplexed as to what she meant.

"This is the reason Teacher never sent me any letters except to give homework."

Luoluo opened her eyes wide and seriously said, "None of you understand Teacher's intentions. He... he pampers me."

Guardian Li was startled, then asked, "Then Your Highness, how come you understand?"

Luoluo said matter-of-factly, "Because I'm Teacher's student."

Guardian Li originally intended to continue her persuasions, but seeing Luoluo's expression, all she did was sigh.

Luoluo comforted her, "No matter what Mother thinks, she doesn't mean me any harm. After all, I am her daughter by blood."

Guardian Li thought, this truly is the case. Empress only has this one treasured daughter; how could she not dote on her?

"But... what if Empress really does plan to marry you to Second Prince?"

"Are you talking about my cousin from the Great Western Continent? I met him once when I was still very young."

Luoluo recalled those childhood years and giggled. "He certainly won't want to marry me."

Guardian Li thought, that second prince has no means of inheriting the throne of the Great Western Continent, but if he marries you, he can become the next White Emperor. Why wouldn't he be willing?

"Who's willing to marry a tigress?"

Luoluo stretched out her little hands and assumed a pouncing posture. "If he really has gotten so bold and insists on marrying me, I'll bite him to death."

After saying this, she opened her mouth and growled. She didn't seem like a tiger, but a little cat, almost impossibly adorable.

Guardian Li could not resist, embracing Luoluo into her bosom and saying with a beaming face, "Who wouldn't like a little baby like my princess?"

Then she remembered something and huffed, "It's only the Pope that is not blessed with this happiness."

Luoluo couldn't help but giggle at this grumbling, then she blinked and whispered a few words into her ear.

Guardian Li froze at these words, then asked, "So this is what Your Highness was thinking?"

Luoluo opened her eyes wide and innocently returned, "I'm not thinking about anything."

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Beyond the cliff, clouds lingered.

Tang Thirty-Six stared at Zhexiu's pale cheeks, his own complexion somewhat pale as he said, "Don't scare me like that."

Zhexiu realized that his joke had not been effective, so he had returned to his habitual silence.

Tang Thirty-Six turned to Chen Changsheng and asked, "Just what's going on here?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "Just as you saw."

Tang Thirty-Six was quite incensed, shooting back, "He was still brimming with energy yesterday; how was it possible to tell that he's at death's door?"

Yesterday, on the plateau, Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu had worked together to kill the White Tiger Divine General.

Although Chen Changsheng's swordplay was admittedly extremely powerful, Zhexiu had been the one who really determined the outcome.

Everyone who had witnessed that sight would probably find it impossible to forget.

Zhexiu had silently approached the White Tiger Divine General's

back like he was a real ghost.

The White Tiger Divine General had been the second-ranked Divine General of the Great Zhou and he had been at the peak of Star Condensation. He could have been numbered among the top ten individuals beneath the Divine Domain.

Yet even when Zhexiu was at his back, he was still completely oblivious!

This matter itself was incredibly bizarre and terrifying.

And that wasn't even considering how Zhexiu's claws had torn a hole in the White Tiger Divine General's almost perfect Star Domain.

The level of strength Zhexiu had displayed on the plateau was far greater and more terrifying than what he had shown several years ago in the capital.

Tang Thirty-Six had been deeply shocked and thought that Zhexiu had had some sort of lucky encounter on the plains of the north, or perhaps had advanced by leaps and bounds through fighting demon experts. As for the illness, he thought it had been cured.

He had no idea that not only had Zhexiu's illness not been cured, it had even gotten worse.

The Tide Rush of Blood was a strange illness that Zhexiu had brought out from the womb. As he aged, the illness grew more serious, breaking out with increasing frequency.

Accompanied by unimaginable pain, his meridians would be broadened, his sea of consciousness widened, his strength climbing at shocking speeds.

This was not necessarily a good thing. It was just like a great river gradually rising, about to run over the dikes. While it seemed fierce and unstoppable, once the dikes collapsed, would any of the water remain?

The increase in the speed at which he strengthened signified that his body was getting closer and closer to collapse.

Based on his current status, Zhexiu was currently getting stronger at unimaginable speeds, which was also proof that the day was getting closer and closer. On this day, a furious tide of true essence would burst out of his meridians while his rapidly rising star radiance would tear his body apart. The result would be his death.

Tang Thirty-Six stared into Chen Changsheng's eyes and said, "Four years ago, you clearly said that you could cure his illness."

Chen Changsheng fell quiet for a few moments, then said, "I didn't think it would come so quickly, and also..."

He didn't finish his sentence, because he couldn't bear to finish it. In the last few years, Zhexiu had fought with the demon experts on the northern frontier far too often, placing a severe strain on his body. Moreover, he had not promptly taken his medicine. These factors led to Zhexiu's current serious condition.

Tang Thirty-Six continued to stare at Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng understood what he meant and shook his head. "I sent him one from the very first bottle, but it did nothing."

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "Is there really no other method?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "Normal medicinal techniques don't have much effect. In my view, the simplest and most effective method is the one the Divine Empress used at the summit of the Mausoleum of Books, breaking up my body and soul and reforging them."

The Tianhai Divine Empress was dead, and it would be incredibly difficult to find a second expert of the Concealed Divinity Realm.

The reclusive Wang Zhice might have reached this legendary realm, but in the vastness of the world, where could one seek him out?

"Another method is to obtain a sufficient quantity of Sacred Light and insert it into his body."

Chen Changsheng continued, "If we can find a way to reach the Sacred Light Continent, then there's still hope."

Tang Thirty-Six's complexion slightly improved.

Although still elusive, hope was still hope.

And from Chen Changsheng's words, he could tell that Zhexiu's life was not as short as the ten days to half a month that Zhexiu had jokingly mentioned.

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "How long does he really have?"

Chen Changsheng thought it over but did not give a precise answer.

"I will think of a way to extend this period."

He truly needed a longer period of time, as it was not easy to find a path or method to reach the Sacred Light Continent.

More importantly, before they did this, they had to first resolve the matters on this continent.

Zhexiu said, "I will strive to live a few more years."

Chapter 923 – The Journey of Old Youths in Mount Li

Tang Thirty-Six's gaze moved between Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu as he asked, "Why is it that when we're discussing such a grave and frightening issue, the two of you can be so calm?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "As I said to you in the Orthodox Academy, I had an illness when I was a child that made it so I wouldn't live past the age of twenty."

It was impossible for Tang Thirty-Six to forget this.

Back then, the Orthodox Academy had been shrouded in clouds of sorrow.

In their ears, every word of Chen Changsheng's from back then had been his last will and testament.

Zhexiu commented, "I've also had this illness since I was a child."

Yes, from a certain perspective, Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu had lived similarly tragic lives.

Upon coming to this world, they knew that it would be impossible for them to stay for too long.

There was no better way to describe the saying 'facing death to live'.

Presumably, they had spent a period of time downcast, disappointed, perhaps even in despair, spending every waking hour staring at the shadow of death. Finally, they became numb, and thus calm.

At present, they were still quite young, but in their stance towards death, they were more apathetic than the vast majority of this world's elders.

This made one sigh in praise, but also in sorrow and grief.

Hu Thirty-Two sighed.

Ye Xiaolian, who had not spoken at all, turned around and wiped her eyes.

The cliff was quiet, the atmosphere somewhat depressed.

Tang Thirty-Six had a stranger feeling, an inexplicable sense of apology. He muttered to himself, "Should I have also gotten a childhood illness?"

Zhexiu expressionlessly said, "You've always been sick."

Tang Thirty-Six widened his eyes and asked, "What illness?"

Chen Changsheng proposed, "The illness of wealth?"

Seeing as they were still in the mood to tease him, Tang Thirty-Six knew that circumstances were not so tense and disastrous as he imagined. Slightly relieved, he patted Zhexiu on the shoulder and said, "Then let's go. Whether it's a dragon pool, tiger cave, or the Myriad Sword Array, we'll accompany you today and satisfy your final wishes."

He was naturally referring to the mountain shrouded in clouds across from them.

Zhexiu corrected, "It's not for certain that I'll die, so you can't say that it's my final wish."

Chen Changsheng approved, "That's right. I've already lived past the age of twenty."

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "Then why do we have to go to Mount Li?"

Chen Changsheng answered, "Because it's right there."

Why were they going to Mount Li?

Because Qi Jian was at Mount Li and Zhexiu wanted to see her. It was just that simple.

And besides, Mount Li was very close to Holy Maiden Peak, so it

didn't take much time to visit.

To Chen Changsheng, there were two reasons for this journey to Mount Li. One was to satisfy Zhexiu's desire, but the important reason was that he had once read a treatise on the sword in the Daoist Canon that had mentioned a certain method in the Mount Li Sword Sect's possession. This method could help Zhexiu stabilize his illness, but Chen Changsheng didn't know if there was anyone in Mount Li that still cultivated this method.

The chain was barely visible in the clouds, swaying in the wind. It seemed very dangerous, but to Chen Changsheng's party, crossing it was not a hard task.

In a short time, they crossed the seemingly bottomless canyon and reached the mountain on the other side.

With Ye Xiaolian's direction, they traversed the steep mountain paths to the peaks in the north.

They walked for some time, winding their way around several verdant mountains. Finally, they saw the main peak of Mount Li in the distance.

Mount Li's main peak was divided into two sections by the clouds. The bottom was verdant slopes while above the clouds was naked rock, a stone pillar that soared to the heavens. In the dazzling sunlight, it looked from the distance like a massive sword prepared to pierce into the sky.

As they gazed at this stone mountain, Chen Changsheng's party felt a fierce sword intent assaulting their senses.

They even felt that the light reflected off this mountain could become a sword Qi spanning the world at any moment.

As they approached this mountain, the feeling grew more and more vivid. However, they never saw a flying sword come to inquire as to their purpose, only the occasional sword glow in the depths of the clouds. Through Ye Xiaolian's introduction, they

learned that the disciples of the various peaks were probably engaged in diligent practice.

Chen Changsheng was extremely talented in the art of the sword and had also spent a lot of time researching the Mount Li Sword Style. As a result, just from the sword glows alone, he could see what sword style the disciples were practicing, what path of the sword they cultivated. He was full of praise for the level that these disciples had already reached.

Zhexiu's and Tang Thirty-Six's impressions of these sword glows were more instinctual. They felt that the sword glows were blinding, the sword intents mighty but also honest and straightforward, giving off an aura of discipline and strength. They seemed youthful and spirited, brimming with vigor and vitality.

Even after all the stories between them and the Mount Li Sword Sect in the last few years, Tang Thirty-Six still didn't like it, but even he had to admit that this sight made him recall the Orthodox Academy.

His most beloved Orthodox Academy.

It was the same for Zhexiu and Chen Changsheng. They even felt that if they hadn't entered the Orthodox Academy, cultivating in Mount Li was also a most excellent choice.

As they took the stone path, they gradually climbed to higher altitudes. The forests chilled, their leaves growing sparse. The winds began to strengthen, and the clouds greatly dispersed. Gradually, they were able to clearly make out the sights on those mountains.

They saw countless clearings on the cliffs, covered with sword glows, while in front of a few secluded caves, disciples sat cross-legged as they comprehended the sword.

Ye Xiaolian explained to them that those caves were often the residences of Mount Li's elders while the pavilion surrounded by

maples was the Discipline Hall. The stone building higher up was the Sword Hall, and the several dozen little white courtyards spread out along the clearings were meant for disciples, while up ahead was...

"What sort of stone is this?"

Tang Thirty-Six pointed at a squarish stone on the side of the road, glossy and smooth, as if it had been washed for tens of thousands of years.

In terms of shape, there was nothing special about this stone, but they could faintly sense a sword aura from it, so it was clearly not something ordinary.

Ye Xiaolian explained, "The founder of Mount Li honed his sword for three hundred years to complete his Dao. It is said that this is the stone that he used to hone his sword."

Tang Thirty-Six commented, "If that legend is true, then this really is a treasure. I wonder how many crystals one would get if they auctioned it off at Xuelao City."

Ye Xiaolian snapped, "What you need to ponder is not how much money you can exchange it for, but how many days you can live with all of the Mount Li Sword Sect at your heels."

Tang Thirty-Six indifferently said, "It's just a joke; why so serious?"

After saying this, he intended to walk past, but he was stopped again by Ye Xiaolian.

"Now, this stone is called the Sword Separating Stone. Any cultivator who wants to enter Mount Li's main peak needs to remove their swords here to show respect."

Ye Xiaolian added, "If you're just walking past, don't blame me if something happens to you."

"Truly quite arrogant."

Tang Thirty-Six didn't have a good impression of the Mount Li Sword Sect in the first place, and he was the one who was usually the most arrogant of all, so he said, "If I don't remove my sword, what will happen?"

Ye Xiaolian knew of his temper and didn't continue to agitate him. "It's also fine to not remove your sword, but then you have to wait for a Mount Li disciple from the mountain to pick you up."

Tang Thirty-Six thought this very troublesome and didn't believe that anything would really happen, so he walked past the stone.

Chen Changsheng shook his head at this sight.

Just when Tang Thirty-Six walked past the Sword Separating Stone, a pure and mild sword aura, not fierce at all, suddenly emerged from the stone.

A ripple of light ran across the sheath of the Wenshui Sword, upon which it began to buzz, as if responding, explaining.

Whooshwhooshwhooshwhoosh. Several dozen white streaks shot out of the clouds.

Several dozen swords arrived, quietly hovering in the air, their sharp points aimed at Chen Changsheng's party.

Chapter 924 – Meeting Qiushan in a Great River of Myriad Swords

The swords exuded a chilling sword intent, swift and mighty to the extreme.

More frightening was the energy being released by these swords. It was steady and firm, like a mountain, or a mountain gate made from stone.

Mount Li had no mountain gate. Its swords served that purpose.

Tang Thirty-Six was not concerned about these swords hovering in the air. On the contrary, he found them very interesting.

He excitedly said to Chen Changsheng, "This is very similar to your sword style. Could it be that you were born so that you could come to Mount Li and learn the sword?"

Zhexiu was far more sensitive to danger than anyone else in their group, so he sensed that those swords could unleash a thunderous strike at any moment. He stepped forward and pulled Tang Thirty-Six behind him while his right hand gripped the hilt of his sword.

But he had forgotten that his sword was the Demon Commander's Banner Sword. The Mount Li Sword Sect was a righteous sect of the Human race, so it was extremely sensitive to the Qi of the Banner Sword.

Whooshwhooshwhooshwhoosh! Several hundred swords quickly flew out from the mountains.

Chen Changsheng had no time to react, but the Divine Staff, upon sensing the power and danger of these several hundred swords, appeared on its own and began emitting dazzling rays of light.

A divine Qi enveloped the stone path.

The Sword Separation Stone was not within this light.

All of Mount Li whistled and howled!

Countless swords burst out of the mountains, soaring through the clouds. They formed a magnificent river of swords that coursed through the mountains, protecting the peaks of Mount Li!

This was Mount Li's famed Myriad Sword Array!

Although the swords making up this river were not as famous as the ones from the Sword Pool, they were extremely sharp and had their own unstoppable momentum.

Let alone Chen Changsheng's party, even Zhou Dufu or the Tianhai Divine Empress would have found it impossible to directly confront the Myriad Sword Array.

Fortunately, this river of swords that traversed the sky only journeyed around the mountains and did not immediately attack them.

Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu didn't sense any killing intent, and faintly understood what the swords desired. The former gripped the Divine Staff while the latter loosened the grip on his sword, and both retreated several steps.

The river of swords was high in the sky, but its awe-inspiring sword intent was already on the ground, ready at any moment to cut everything on the stone path into powder with no hope of resistance.

Tang Thirty-Six was somewhat angry, thinking, Mount Li should clearly know who's coming, but they still insist on doing this. Are they just showing off their strength?

Once Chen Changsheng's group retreated behind the Sword Separating Stone, the several hundred swords became somewhat pacified, the grandiose river of swords also slowing.

"This is truly absurd."

Tang Thirty-Six said to Chen Changsheng, "You're Senior Su Li's

direct disciple, a member of the Mount Li Sword Sect in every way, perhaps even a peer of the Sect Master. And yet these junior disciples actually dare to use the Myriad Sword Array to intimidate you. Aren't you angry?"

Chen Changsheng knew that his mood was assuredly foul and helplessly relied, "What do you think I should do?"

Tang Thirty-Six declared, "You should use your status as Pope to become part of the Mount Li Sword Sect and then become Sect Master, making Qiushan Jun and the rest of those fellows die from anger."

He said all this with a very loud voice, wanting all of Mount Li to hear.

"You scoundrel, how can your mouth still be so despicable?"

A rather familiar voice came from the path in front of them.

Tang Thirty-Six and the owner of this voice had quarreled many times, so he immediately recognized it. He sneered, "Do you really think that there's no chance of what I said becoming reality?"

Guan Feibai walked down the stone path. He wanted to retort with a few taunts, but then he realized that if Chen Changsheng really did enter the Mount Li Sword Sect, then with his status and seniority, Tang Thirty-Six's seemingly absurd proposition might really happen. As a result, his expression flickered.

At this moment, a voice, gentle but dignified, rose up from deep within the clouds.

"For Your Holiness's sacred body to honor us with its presence is the greatest honor for all of Mount Li."

The speaker was naturally the Sect Master of the Mount Li Sword Sect.

Guan Feibai controlled his emotions, solemnly bowed to Chen Changsheng, then brought the group into the cloud-shrouded

mountain.

In a short while, they reached a stone pavilion halfway up the mountain.

Gou Hanshi, Liang Banhu, and an elder of the Sword Hall were waiting here for them.

When the Pope was paying a visit, any other sect would have received him well outside the sect, and the Sect Master themselves would have personally gone. However, Chen Changsheng had not come on a carriage today, and the Mount Li Sword Sect was also no ordinary sect. That they were able to do this on such short notice was already extremely courteous.

Gou Hanshi and Liang Banhu bowed to Chen Changsheng.

The name of Liang Xiaoxiao had long since vanished from the minds of the common people, but it was impossible for Chen Changsheng to forget. He was confident that Liang Banhu also would not be able to forget, which made the mood between them a little strange.

But this mood was quickly broken by what happened next: the elder from the Sword Hall prostrated to Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng was greatly shocked. It had to be said that all the elders of the Mount Li Sword Sect's Sword Hall had profound cultivation levels. These were all elders of remarkable battle prowess, as well as stubborn and proud personalities. Even his status as Pope was usually not enough to make one of them prostrate to him.

He quickly remembered the matter Guan Feibai had discussed on their travels.

An elder of the Mount Li Sword Sect's Sword Hall was covering the retreat in a battle on the snowy plains but was surrounded by demon experts and almost ended up dead. In the end, he was saved by a Cinnabar Pill. Now that he thought about it, that elder of

unparalleled courage was probably the one in front of him.

When he thought of this, Chen Changsheng hurriedly helped the elder stand up and then sternly bowed. In his view, someone like this elder, who had bled in battle for the sake of the Human race, was the one truly worthy of respect. In contrast, all he had done was use his blood to make a few Cinnabar Pills, which really didn't count for anything.

No more words were exchanged as the group made their way to the summit.

At this moment, several hundred disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect had already gathered at the summit. There were presumably far fewer sword glows on the little plateaus of Mount Li's various peaks.

As these disciples gazed at Chen Changsheng's group, their eyes were both curious and wary.

Rivals and competitors of the past were now allies and comrades.

The relationship between the Mount Li Sword Sect and the Orthodox Academy was extremely complicated, so the expressions in these gazes were naturally very complicated as well.

Amusingly, only a small portion of these disciples was looking at Chen Changsheng, while another small portion was looking at Tang Thirty-Six. However, the vast majority of these disciples were gazing at Zhexiu, appearing somewhat restless as they engaged in whispered discussion.

This was naturally not because of Zhexiu's fierce reputation on the battlefield, but because of his relationship with Qi Jian.

Gou Hanshi slightly frowned at this sight, causing the disciples to instantly cease their chattering and assume a respectful stance.

After passing through the crowd, the group saw an ivy-covered cave in the distance, presumably the Sect Master's residence.

There was a stone clearing in front of the cave that was a little higher than the surroundings. The figure standing there was quite easy to see.

Of course, even if they were standing in a crowd of thousands, that person would still be the first to be seen.

Qiushan Jun turned around and looked at Chen Changsheng's party.

Chen Changsheng looked at him, not knowing what to say.

Yesterday, when he had decided to visit Mount Li, he had naturally imagined this sight.

He had originally imagined that Qiushan Jun would find some excuse to avoid this meeting, but only now did it occur to him, would Qiushan Jun be Qiushan Jun if he avoided this meeting?

Chapter 925 – Asking a Blind Man the Way, a Sword's Music in the Heart

The summit was absolutely silent. Zhexiu, Tang Thirty-Six, and the disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect silently watched Qiushan Jun and Chen Changsheng.

The most famous members of this young generation of cultivators were naturally Qiushan Jun and Xu Yourong. It was only later on that Chen Changsheng's name joined their ranks.

The relationship between the three was extremely complex, a story that could be narrated for a very long time.

But to everyone's best knowledge, Chen Changsheng and Qiushan Jun had never met.

The entire continent was very curious to see what would happen in their first meeting.

Today, they had finally met, so now what?

Qiushan Jun calmly bowed and said, "A tough journey."

Chen Changsheng calmly returned the bow and replied, "Long time no see."

In Wenshui City, Qiushan Jun had walked past him, but they had not truly met.

This being the case, this had been their first meeting since their farewell at the Mount Song Army headquarters.

The disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect appeared rather perplexed at Chen Changsheng's reply. Did Eldest Brother and His Holiness the Pope meet before?

Zhexiu and Tang Thirty-Six glanced at each other in surprise.

Ye Xiaolian paid no regard to these matters. Her infatuated gaze constantly switched between Qiushan Jun and Chen Changsheng

as she thought to herself, when I get back to the temple, how should I show off to my junior sisters?

Only Gou Hanshi and the disciples who had returned with Qiushan Jun yesterday knew that these two had interacted with each other at Sloping Cliff Horse Farm.

These people now had rather odd expressions as they watched this sight and recalled this matter. Bai Cai was finding it quite the challenge to stifle his laughter.

His curiosity piqued, Tang Thirty-Six strolled over and asked what was going on.

Upon learning the answer, he found himself rather speechless. Looking at Qiushan Jun and Chen Changsheng, he sighed, "Are the two of you blind?"

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Qiushan Jun said, "You are Tang Tang?"

"You recognize me?" Tang Thirty-Six asked, surprise on his face.

He thought to himself, a person like Qiushan Jun actually recognizes me. He was rather proud, though it was this pride that quickly became the source of his anger.

"I hear that you had an unbearable stench when you came out of the ancestral hall. It looks to me that when you took a bath on the street, you forgot to wash your mouth."

Qiushan Jun shook his head, then indicated that Chen Changsheng should follow him into the cave.

Tang Thirty-Six was incensed by this comment. He didn't care that this person was Qiushan Jun or that this place was the Mount Li Sword Sect. He rolled up his sleeves, intending to engage in a cursing match.

Gou Hanshi quickly pulled him back and pleaded, "Senior

Brother's mood isn't good today, so be a little understanding."

This was true. Although Qiushan Jun was not a gentle nobleman like Gou Hanshi, he had a rather generous demeanor and would rarely speak such biting and jeering words.

Tang Thirty-Six looked at the tightly shut door to the cave and laughed. "So it turns out that even Qiushan Jun can get angry from embarrassment."

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As two of the most outstanding individuals of the younger generation of cultivators, it was hard for them to not be embarrassed by such stupid acts.

And this most embarrassing incident had been exposed in front of the crowd, after which they had been rudely assessed as blind. This was naturally a most awkward situation.

Moreover, for many other reasons, the relationship between Chen Changsheng and Qiushan Jun was already very awkward.

As a result, the two did not speak as they walked into the depths of the cave.

"Master, His Holiness the Pope has arrived."

After saying this, Qiushan Jun seated himself on the side.

A Daoist was seated on the prayer mat, his head lowered as he studied a book that looked like a sword manual, appearing extremely focused. The only part of his head that could be seen was frosty white hair.

Chen Changsheng knew that this was the Sect Master of the Mount Li Sword Sect and subconsciously shifted his gaze towards him.

Coincidentally, the Sect Master also raised his head, and their gazes met.

Chen Changsheng discovered that though the Sect Master had a head of white, his eyes were extremely clear and penetrating. There was no sense of age, only a refreshing clarity.

However, these clear and penetrating eyes also gave off an aura of inscrutability.

Chen Changsheng appeared somewhat surprised, as he felt that this grandmaster of the sword did not seem like someone who had only recently entered the Divine Domain.

"Before Junior Martial Uncle left, I had already crossed that threshold."

The Mount Li Sword Sect Master saw his doubt and smiled. "But there was no good reason to announce it, and I'm not like those Storms from before, needing to accrue vast tracts of land for my clansmen and disciples. Moreover, things like attending rituals are very troublesome, so I did not let the world know."

Chen Changsheng asked, "Then why..."

He naturally wanted to ask why the Mount Li Sword Sect had suddenly announced this matter to the world several days ago.

The Sect Master explained, "The Prince of Xiang broke through that threshold. If I remained seated, the minds of the people might have become unsteady."

Chen Changsheng understood his meaning and gratefully said, "Many thanks to Senior."

The Sect Master replied, "But this is a false reputation, a false power, and only Your Holiness can know. This old Daoist is most afraid of trouble. If there is nothing happening, I am completely unwilling to leave the mountain."

Chen Changsheng replied, "If it is not necessary, I will not disturb Senior's peaceful cultivation."

The Sect Master asked, "If Your Holiness does not want to disturb

my peaceful cultivation, why are you sitting before me?"

Chen Changsheng was somewhat embarrassed, saying, "But this matter has to be resolved at some point."

The Mount Li Sword Sect Master forced a smile and asked, "That wolf cub's illness has been cured?"

Chen Changsheng shook his head. "Not only is it not cured, there's signs that it's getting worse."

The Sect Master sighed. "This being the case, meeting is far inferior to not meeting."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Besides seeing people, this visit to Mount Li is also to seek medical advice."

The Sect Master asked, "What do you mean?"

Chen Changsheng gave a summary of the state of Zhexiu's illness, then added, "I once read in the Daoist Canon that the Mount Li Sword Sect once had a Daoist technique that involved the upright, honorable, and wondrous music of the sword, of a most harmonious and forthright nature. I believe that this Daoist technique can temporarily control Zhexiu's Tide Rush of Blood for a time."

The Mount Li Sword Sect Master squinted as he asked, "Your Holiness's intention is to have that wolf cub learn this Daoist technique of my Mount Li Sword Sect?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "Correct. I request Senior's assistance."

The Sect Master said, "I really have heard of this Daoist technique, the Just Sword's Clear Music, but it has not been passed down for many years."

Chen Changsheng also knew of this matter, but he still had one last hope. "If the sword music's manual still exists, there's still a chance of learning this technique."

The Sect Master silently smiled, but he seemingly unintentionally closed the book he had been studying.

Chen Changsheng's gaze fell on the cover of this book and his eyes widened. It was the manual to the Just Sword's Clear Music!

The Sect Master faintly smiled and said, "The Just Sword's Clear Music truly has ceased to be passed down. I only began to learn it yesterday, and I cannot be sure when I will grasp it."

At this point, Chen Changsheng finally realized that the Mount Li Sword Sect had already made arrangements for this matter.

He clasped his hands and made a deep bow to the Mount Li Sword Sect Master, then said with a sincere expression, "Many thanks for Senior's assistance."

For an expert of the Divine Domain skilled in the sword to learn the Just Sword's Clear Music and then teach it to Zhexiu was naturally many times better than for Zhexiu to cultivate the technique on his own.

The Mount Li Sword Sect Master smiled, but did not respond.

Chapter 926 – Su Li's Sword Path

Chen Changsheng was extremely talented in terms of cultivation, but his knowledge of the secular world was rather mediocre. He blankly stared for a long time before reacting, then after a period of serious thought, he said, "If I have the opportunity, I will persuade His Majesty the White Emperor and have the sword manual of the Mount Li Sword Style returned."

Several hundred years ago, the allied army of humans and demi-humans embarked on a northward expedition against the Demon race. Several elders of the Mount Li Sword Sect in charge of transporting supplies were late on a delivery and were given the punishment of execution.

With no better method, the Mount Li Sword Sect sent the manual for its sword style to White Emperor City, causing the White Emperor to issue an imperial decree to force Jin Yulu to relent.

To the Mount Li Sword Sect, nothing could be better than regaining the sword manual of the Mount Li Sword Style without getting in conflict with White Emperor City.

At present, the person with the highest chances of accomplishing this feat was naturally Chen Changsheng.

The Mount Li Sword Sect Master was very satisfied at Chen Changsheng's promise.

But Qiushan Jun was slightly raising his brows, somewhat unhappy.

His martial granduncle Su Li had once said that the things lost by Mount Li naturally needed to be taken back by Mount Li.

But since this was the intent of his master, the Sect Master, he was in no position to express his opposition to Chen Changsheng.

Resolving Zhexiu's illness had been the greatest concern, so Chen

Changsheng was now in a much better mood. He asked, "Can they meet now?"

The Sect Master shook his head. "Even if that wolf child learns the Just Sword's Clear Music, it can only temporarily suppress his illness, not cure it. They naturally cannot meet yet."

Chen Changsheng felt very helpless. "What need is there for this?"

The Mount Li Sword Sect Master also felt very helpless. "This is the will of Junior Martial Uncle. Who dares to defy it?"

Chen Changsheng knew Su Li's personality, so there was nothing he could say.

Qiushan Jun suddenly said, "I think Martial Granduncle made a mistake in this matter."

The Sect Master replied, "But he is your Martial Granduncle. You must respect and love him."

Qiushan Jun responded, "Given Martial Granduncle's personality, it's truly hard for anyone to love or respect him."

Chen Changsheng recalled that journey back south from the snowy plains and glanced at Qiushan Jun, knowing what he was thinking and what worries were on his mind.

In that instant, they felt like they had returned to Sloping Cliff Horse Farm.

But it was only an instant, and they quickly felt uncomfortable and looked away.

"Is there really no way to stretch the rules a little?"

He said to the Sect Master, "In any case, Senior Su Li isn't here."

The Sect Master answered, "Although Junior Martial Uncle has left, his sword is still at the mountain."

Chen Changsheng felt like there was another meaning in these

words and asked, "Sword?"

The Sect Master explained, "Junior Martial Uncle left a sword behind. If someone is able to surpass this sword, they can ignore his decrees."

Chen Changsheng thought, then said, "I want to try."

"I will not hide it from you. Wanting to break that sword is extremely dangerous."

The Mount Li Sword Sect Master sternly warned, "Junior Martial Uncle is your teacher on the path of the sword, so you can be considered my junior brother. I am not willing to see you take this risk."

Chen Changsheng replied, "This humble junior dares not accept."

He was referring to how the Sect Master called him 'junior brother'.

The Mount Li Sword Sect Master laughed and said, "It was truly a slip of the tongue. Even if you dared to accept it, I wouldn't dare to really address you as such, or else some people wouldn't be happy."

If Chen Changsheng became the Mount Li Sword Sect Master's junior brother, wouldn't he become the martial uncle to Qiushan Jun and the rest of the Divine Kingdom's Seven Laws?

As for who wouldn't be happy, the answer was obvious.

Chen Changsheng glanced at Qiushan Jun.

Qiushan Jun ignored his gaze, saying to the Mount Li Sword Sect Master, "Master, if Junior Sister were to hear this conversation, just how much of your beard do you think you could keep?"

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In the foothills behind Mount Li's main peak was a cliff, and in front of this cliff was a stone wall. This wall was covered with ivy,

the ivy speckled with wildflowers.

Only by walking up close could one see that there was a path about two feet wide in this ivy-covered wall.

One could faintly hear the melodious songs of birds from the other end of this path and smell the aroma of flowers. If one looked carefully, one could see a lush green.

There seemed to be a verdant valley on the other side.

Qiushan Jun, Gou Hanshi, and a few other disciples of Mount Li brought Chen Changsheng's group to the cliff.

Zhexiu silently stared at the seam in the stone.

"For the last few years, Junior Sister has been quietly cultivating on that side. If you want to meet her, you have to walk through here."

Gou Hanshi explained to Chen Changsheng's group, "This path was made by Martial Granduncle before he broke through into the Divine, cleaved out of this cliff using his sword. The stone walls still have sword intent and killing intent, making it extremely dangerous. This is the sword you will have to break through."

Chen Changsheng was well aware that after the Heaven Shrouding Sword was lost in the Garden of Zhou, the sword Su Li used was an ordinary bronze sword forged from a smithy of the village at the base of Mount Li. When he thought of how Su Li had used such an ordinary sword to cleave a path through this cliff to the paradise on the other side, he was stupefied.

His gaze fell on the path through the ivy-covered stone wall.

Countless sword slashes, incredibly deep, could be seen on the wall. Even after several centuries of wind and rain, they had not been worn away.

They were still ten-some zhang from the entrance into the wall, but he could already sense the powerful sword intent contained in

those slashes.

After looking at the wall a few times, Bai Cai and Tang Thirty-Six felt a stabbing pain in their eyes and wanted to cry.

Zhexiu's gaze remained fixed on the wall. He was quiet and abnormally focused, and though his eyes gradually reddened, he did not even blink.

A gust of wind came from the direction of the wall. It rustled the leaves on the ground and blew against Chen Changsheng's clothes.

With a light rip, a straight tear appeared on his sleeve.

The chunk of his sleeve drifted with the wind and off the cliff.

Chen Changsheng lowered his head to look at the base of the cliff. He saw that in a semi-circle of ten-some zhang in radius around the entrance to the path, the ground was extremely smooth, with not even a fallen leaf in sight.

Presumably, as time passed, the fierce sword intent within the stone wall had seeped out, slicing all the fallen leaves and stone gravel in this area into a fine powder.

Such an awe-inspiring and terrifying sword intent was truly a rarity.

It was truly worthy of the strongest expert of the sword in the last one thousand years.

Zhexiu moved.

And then he was stopped by Chen Changsheng.

"I learned the sword from Su Li, so I have a deep understanding of his path of the sword. You should let me try first. Even if I fail, I should still have a chance to retreat. What you need to do is observe. With your observations and your ability to analyze and fight, your probability of success will greatly increase."

Chen Changsheng stared into his eyes as he spoke.

He was right.

Although one only needed to walk through this path scored with countless sword slashes, it was also an extremely challenging battle.

This was their battle with the Su Li from several hundred years ago.

Zhexiu fell into thought, then stopped and said, "Thank you."

There were many things where not many words were needed.

With Zhexiu's personality, a word of thanks was enough to represent many things.

Chen Changsheng took out the Stainless Sword and inserted its hilt into the Vault Sheath.

This was his sword's strongest form.

He had done this when facing Zhu Luo in Xunyang City, when he was forcing his way into the alley of the Northern Military Department in the capital, and even in his battle against two generations of Demon Lords in the snowy mountains.

Today, he wanted to force his way through this stone path, just as powerful of a foe.

The Su Li of several hundred years ago had cleaved out this path to paradise before reaching the Divine Domain and had certainly not reached his future level of strength. However, he had already cultivated the sword to an extremely high level. To him and Zhexiu, this Su Li was still an almost unreachable existence.

Chen Changsheng wielded his sword and took a step forward.

With just this one step, several holes were torn in his clothes.

Chapter 927 – Breaking Through the Sword Path

Chen Changsheng thought for a few moments, then took another step.

A slightly chilly wind brushed against his hair, causing some of it to drift away.

Sword intent, mighty and invisible, had come with the wind and silently struck.

This time, he thought for an even longer time.

He had to make a choice. Would he use the star radiance in his three-hundred-sixty-five Qi openings to form a Star Domain for defense, or would he use sword intent?

Ultimately, he chose the latter.

Because Su Li had been his teacher on the path of the sword.

Today, he naturally had to use the sword to challenge this path, as only this way could he turn in an eligible answer sheet.

Countless sword intents left his sheath and flew into the air.

The Qi and intent of these swords were a motley crew, not very similar. But mystically, they worked together in harmony, with no conflict between them.

Gou Hanshi was slightly moved at this sight, and praise appeared in his eyes.

Despite the high level Chen Changsheng had reached in the path of the sword, his sword intent was still far less concentrated and pure than Su Li's, making it a difficult challenge to win in terms of quality.

So he chose to use numbers to make up for quality.

This seemed very ordinary, but on second thought, it was

extremely unusual.

Besides him, who else in the world could simultaneously possess so many sword intents and control them as they pleased?

Countless tiny grinding sounds could be heard.

The wind suddenly vanished, but the ivy on the stone wall began to sway.

This ivy that had grown together with this sword intent for centuries naturally wouldn't be harmed by it, but now was beginning to break and fall.

There was clearly nothing to see, but countless swords seemed to be engaging in silent battle in front of the stone wall.

In an extremely tiny area, countless sword intents were engaging in a most subtle contest.

The Qi of the world grew much more awe-inspiring with this battle and the light from the sky suddenly went dim.

Chen Changsheng walked up to the ivy.

Piece by piece, the ivy crumbled away, revealing the entrance to the path running through the stone wall.

He entered without hesitation.

The battle of sword intents continued behind him. The air in the entrance to the path was suddenly filled with countless holes and white eddies of Qi, obscuring the scene within.

After a few moments, the stone suddenly exploded with the cries of swords.

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The path through the stone wall was very narrow, the sky a thin sliver high above him. While walking through this path, Chen Changsheng felt that his surroundings were rather dim.

The walls of this passage were covered in straight sword slashes, the two ends extremely thin while the middle was a little thicker. They looked rather mellow, but also extremely sharp.

Each sharp sword slash represented a sword intent.

Those sword intents rose from the walls and fiercely slashed at Chen Changsheng's face, simultaneously assailing his Ethereal Palace and sea of consciousness.

Chen Changsheng was not the least bit panicked. He steadily pressed forward, his sword held horizontally in front of his eyebrows like an iron chain.

This was the third sword Su Li had taught him: the Stupid Sword.

This technique emphasized one's personality, and with Chen Changsheng's persevering and composed personality, this technique in his hands was truly as hardy as a boulder.

Clingclingcling. The path echoed with sword cries that sounded like two swords were constantly clashing against each other.

The straight body of Chen Changsheng's sword lay in front of his eyes, and sparks flew all along its edges. The two walls of the path were instantly covered with several dozen new sword slashes.

His sword could block the visible sword intent, but it could not block the invisible sword intent that assailed his body.

As he proceeded further into the path, the aura of intimidating awe grew more and more concentrated. His sea of consciousness was already raging with waves that were being chopped into foam by the sword intent.

As this foam appeared and dissipated, he felt a stabbing pain in his eyes and a hacking sensation at his skin.

These sword intents were the true test. Someone without a firm

will and a calm and pure spiritual sense would have found it impossible to endure.

His sword held before him, Chen Changsheng continued forward.

The path near the entrance was extremely narrow, but it gradually widened as he walked. However, this did not mean that the path was easier to walk. On the contrary, the sword slashes grew more and more numerous, the sword Qi emerging from them more and more majestic, the sword intents more and more awe-inspiring. More frightening was that these sword slashes were gradually forming a connection and creating an unending stream of attacks.

Each sword slash was a single attack of a sword. When connected, they would become a set of sword techniques.

It was only at this moment that Chen Changsheng truly began to confront Su Li's cultivation on the path of the sword.

Awe-inspiring sword intent emerged from the walls and obscured the light from above and the distant smear of green as it surged toward him like a sea.

Chen Changsheng's body slightly swayed as he almost lost his footing. His face slightly paled.

If he had not honed his mind countless times in the sea of sword intent within the Vault Sheath, he might have failed here.

How could he pass through this vast sea of sword intent? How could he break through Su Li's sword techniques?

Chen Changsheng attentively listened to the howls as the sword intent flew through the air, calmly assessing the tears the sword intents cleaved in the air, sensing their subtle changes.

As usual, his eyes were as clean as a small brook, free of dust. They reflected the drifting clouds and the sword glows that flashed between them.

His sword was no longer held in front of him but extended straight towards the sky.

The Stupid Sword could only defend. How could he break the sword techniques Su Li left behind? The answer, of course, was to use sword techniques.

A sword glow tore through the air, shattering the sword Qi coming down from the heavens. This was the Heavenly Dao Academy's Sword of Hithering Light, so fast that not even the heavens could catch it.

Several flowers made of swords trembled as they appeared in the wind and blocked each attack descending from the heavens.

There were thirteen of these sword silhouettes, each one of them a willow branch, seemingly delicate but incredibly tenacious, able to block any one of those sword blows.

There was the Blossoming Flower Brocade, Mountain Spirit Splits the Cliff, the sternness of the law sword, turning mountains that also welcomed guests. Finally, they ascended to burn the heavens.

These were all sword techniques of Mount Li, so they were naturally able to break Su Li's Mount Li Sword Style.

There were also the Orthodox Academy's Toppling Mountain Staff and True Sword of the Orthodoxy. He was the Pope and also the Principal of the Orthodox Academy, so he was followed by a divine aura!

It was just like when he contended against Xu Yourong's Sword of Great Light on the Bridge of Helplessness.

He used all the sword styles he had learned over his life.

Sword glows illuminated the gloomy path.

Countless famous, or obscure, or unorthodox sword techniques appeared at his hands.

Time slowly passed.

Chen Changsheng gripped his sword and continued forward. After some time, he finally reached the tail end of the path.

Even through the dazzling light of countless sword glows and the awesome might of the sword intent stabbing at his eyes, he could still see the lush valley beyond the path.

And yet, it seemed like he could only walk up to here.

He had used all the sword styles he had ever learned, but he had still failed to defeat all the sword techniques embedded within this stone wall.

It was only now that he understood something.

In terms of cultivation on the path of the sword, there were very few people in this world at a higher level than him, and none who knew more sword styles.

But today, he was facing Su Li. Su Li knew even more sword styles than he did and his sword intent was much more powerful and condensed.

Su Li was his teacher on the path of the sword, so how could he possibly surpass him on this sword path?

Chen Changsheng stopped and put down his sword.

Those sword intents sensed the change in his mood. They halted their attacks and quietly floated in the air, waiting for his decision.

Retreat, or continue?

Chapter 928 – The Last Lesson

The sword intents were quiet but no less intimidating. Even using one's spiritual sense to perceive them could harm the sea of consciousness.

A stone had been shaken loose by the battle of swords and now dropped from above. However, it failed to reach the ground, as it was chopped into countless pieces by the invisible sword intents, its final form a fine sand that was blown into the valley by the wind, leaving behind no trace.

Chen Changsheng watched this sight and fell into a long period of silence.

And then he lowered his head and thought for a very long time.

He was recalling the scenes when Su Li taught him the sword in the wilderness and a few things that happened afterward.

Before Su Li left for the Sacred Light Continent with the Holy Maiden, he left several letters for the world.

One letter had severed the Longevity Sect's last bit of daring while another had cut off Zhu Luo's arm.

These letters were naturally most precious and terrifying objects.

Chen Changsheng had been given two letters.

From this act, one could see that Su Li truly did value him, even regarding him as the disciple that would take up his legacy.

These two letters had saved Chen Changsheng's life twice while also greatly advancing his cultivation in the sword.

Right now, this path was full of sword intent, waiting to be stimulated, the sharpest existences in the world, able to cut apart all things.

This made him recall the scene when he opened Su Li's letter in the Orthodox Academy's kitchen.

At the time, he stood amidst the sword intents, not even daring to move.

Now, he still could not move.

Could he only walk this far?

Chen Changsheng suddenly remembered that before Su Li left, he had also left a letter for Qiushan Jun.

But Qiushan Jun had not wanted it.

Perhaps this was the discrepancy between him and Qiushan Jun?

When Su Li was teaching him the sword, Su Li had said that he wasn't bad, with only a little gap between him and Qiushan.

When parting at Xunyang City, Wang Po had also told him that he was rather good, but still just a little less than Qiushan.

From Xining to the capital, he had heard similar words many times.

At the start, in the conversations of others, the disparity between him and Qiushan Jun was as vast as the one between the heavens and the earth. Gradually, this gap began to shrink, but even now, when he was Pope and Qiushan Jun was still an ordinary disciple of the Mount Li Sword Sect that had hidden away for five years, there was still no one that would say that he had surpassed Qiushan Jun.

Chen Changsheng gazed at those unseeable sword intents as if he was gazing at Su Li himself. "I still want to try."

He wanted to try and see if he could take one more step, or even walk out of this path.

He wanted to try and prove to Su Li that the choice to teach him the sword was the right one.

He wanted to try and prove to the world that perhaps he might not be stronger than Qiushan Jun, but he was not lacking, at least in some aspects.

His mind was set, his aura calm.

His mind was clear and bright, like a sword that had been washed by water for countless years.

Innumerable swords silently emerged from his sheath, countless fish leaping from the water, seeking to become dragons.

Innumerable sword glows illuminated the gloomy passage, snatching away the luster of the world as they cleaved at those invincible sword intents.

The crisp cries of swords suddenly burst out, gradually forming into a line, the line that divided the sea from the sky. And then they suddenly fell silent.

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The people on the cliff nervously watched the path.

Ivy obscured their vision and sword intents disordered the light. It was impossible for them to make out any details, but they could vaguely make out those sword glows.

Suddenly, the sword glows suddenly exploded with light, making it impossible to see anything.

Sword cries rang out in a burst of noise, making it impossible to hear anything else.

They could only see the winds stir gravel and dust that clashed and struggled within the path like a living dragon.

As they watched this sight and sensed the vibrations from the mountain, those ordinary disciples slightly paled and thought in shock, His Holiness the Pope truly is Martial Granduncle Su Li's legacy disciple. His cultivation in the sword really is as powerful as rumored. Is he really going to walk through it?

Bai Cai asked in concern, "Does he intend to destroy this path?"

Even when Chen Changsheng began to use his swords to shatter the walls of the path, Qiushan Jun remained quiet, his expression still extremely calm.

Now, his face finally showed a hint of sternness. "If he can destroy this path, then it naturally counts as a success."

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This path was cleaved out of the rock of Mount Li's main peak. Su Li had used an unimaginably powerful attack to slash a path through, and in the following centuries, the sword slashes on the walls continuously increased, sword intent seeping into the mountain. The walls had become so sturdy that even one of the precious treasures of the Orthodoxy would find it hard to destroy them, so Chen Changsheng naturally did not possess this ability.

But he walked out.

After some time, he finally managed to walk out of the path and onto the meadow at its exit.

His clothes were covered in tears and his hairband had snapped, causing his black hair to scatter behind him. His appearance was quite wretched.

Blood was dripping from his clothes, its scent gradually weakened by a cool breeze. Fortunately, after the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, he had grasped a few methods and so prevented anything strange from occurring.

He was born with a stainless constitution and his spiritual sense was both serene and powerful to the extreme. His meditations were incredibly effective, allowing him to accrue vast amounts of star radiance. When performing his first Meditative Introspection, he had been bathed in the true blood of the Black Frost Dragon. When condensing his Star Domain, he had simultaneously illuminated three-hundred-sixty-five Qi openings. He could be said

to have the most perfect body for cultivation in the world.

But today, he had suffered so many injuries.

Besides his body covered in sword slashes, there were several thin wounds on his face and a small part of his left eyebrow had been cut off. If this wound were in a slightly different position, it would have been on his eye. One could imagine just how dangerous the situation had been just now and just how terrifying the sword intents Su Li had left behind were.

As he stood at the path's exit and gazed at the verdant valley and cloudless blue sky, Chen Changsheng felt incredibly refreshed.

Today, in confronting the sword intents Su Li had left behind, he had used everything he had learned in his life, leaving nothing behind, keeping nothing hidden.

This was not the most dangerous battle in his life of cultivation, but it was his most delightful one.

Countless sword styles had been used to their fullest extent, cleaving open the path and the world and also broadening his mind.

He even wanted to shout at this verdant valley and cloudless sky.

But this was not in accord with his personality.

In the end, he didn't shout, but turned around to look back at the path.

After walking through this path, he was naturally aware that the sword intents and techniques on its walls were not completely left behind from when Su Li cut open this path. Many of them had been left by Su Li later on, and there were also several that were left by other people from the Mount Li Sword Sect.

He gazed silently at this path through stone for a very long time.

He seemed to be looking into the past.

Several hundred years ago, on one of Su Li's rare returns, he

came to this place and casually slashed at this stone wall.

Those elders of the Sword Hall with profound cultivations embraced their swords while meditating within this path for the sake of advancing. When enlightened, they would slash at the walls of this path.

After several hundred years, this place contained the essence of Su Li's sword, and also the spirit and will of the Mount Li Sword Sect.

This path was used by the disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect to hone their sword hearts.

Su Li had left his own daughter in this lush valley, certain that Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu would attempt this path.

To put it another way, this had been his last lesson to Chen Changsheng.

Chapter 929 – If You Want to Enter My Door, You Must Endure This Sword

What about Zhexiu? Chen Changsheng thought to himself, could it be that Su Li just wants to force Zhexiu to walk through this path brimming with sword intent to discipline him?

Or was it a test a father left for his son-in-law?

"My father's motives are not as beautiful as you imagine. He just doesn't want Zhexiu to meet me. In truth, he definitely didn't think that you would really be able to force your way through."

Upon hearing this voice, Chen Changsheng turned around.

And then he saw someone he had not seen for many years: Qi Jian.

The Qi Jian he recognized from the Mausoleum of Books and then the Garden of Zhou had been thin and short, a timid and weak young man. Thus, even though he had become aware of her true status ages ago, seeing her wearing a green dress still stunned him for quite some time.

"Long time no see," he finally said.

Qi Jian pushed her messy hair behind her ear and asked, "How many years? It's hard to tell the passing of time in these mountains, and I'm too lazy to keep count."

She was now a bright and cheerful young lady, appearing even healthier than she was in the past. There was none of the melancholy that Chen Changsheng had imagined.

Chen Changsheng looked around and discovered that this green valley was lush with plant life. He could see waterfalls in the distance and pools of water peeking through the trees while birds constantly sang. It was an exceptionally beautiful sight.

But to be imprisoned in a paradise year-round was still incredibly

arduous.

Upon thinking of this matter and hearing her words, he became a bit more displeased at Su Li and all of Mount Li.

Seeing his expression, Qi Jian softly said, "Your Holiness the Pope, have you perhaps misunderstood something?"

Chen Changsheng asked in surprise, "Are you not imprisoned here?"

Qi Jian replied, "I truly have spent all of these last few years quietly cultivating the sword in this place."

Chen Changsheng asked, "Then why do you need to make excuses for your sect? It's no easy feat to enter and exit this place."

He still felt a little fear from those dangerous sword intents in that stone wall.

If he had to endure this trial each time he wanted to visit, not even the most breathtaking beauty could tempt him to visit this valley.

Qi Jian knew that he was concerned about her and faintly smiled. "Besides your method, there are naturally other ways."

Chen Changsheng froze and thought to himself, are there really other paths to this place? He asked, "Then when can you leave? He... is on that side."

Qi Jian's smile faded as she calmly and firmly said, "If he really wants to meet me, he naturally has to come and see me."

Chen Changsheng faintly understood her meaning, though he had no way of being sure.

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The dragon of dust gradually settled and the light of the sun began to fall on the cliff once more. The path through the stone

wall returned to true peace.

Everyone had apprehensive expressions, unaware of the situation within.

Zhexiu silently stared at the path, in a pensive mood.

Qiushan Jun declared, "He passed through."

Guan Feibai glanced at the position of the sun and an expression of shock appeared on his face. "He only needed forty-five minutes?"

Tang Thirty-Six had no understanding of how difficult it was to traverse that path, but based on Guan Feibai's reaction, he could tell that Chen Changsheng had used an extremely short amount of time. He proudly said, "If you think about it, his swordplay was personally taught by your martial granduncle. How hard could it be for him to go through that path?"

Bai Cai sneered, "When Eldest Brother passed through this path five years ago, he only used thirty minutes."

These words caused Zhexiu to glance at Qiushan Jun and Tang Thirty-Six to fall silent in astonishment.

Qiushan Jun's reputation had already spread across the world, but very few people had seen him personally take action, and Zhexiu and Tang Thirty-Six were no exception.

In truth, they had always wanted to know just how powerful Qiushan Jun was.

The shout in Wenshui City and the drawings on Holy Maiden Peak proved that Qiushan Jun was an extraordinary individual, but still, those did not involve cultivation or fighting.

It was only now that they knew that he truly was very strong.

Five years ago, Qiushan Jun had been younger than Chen Changsheng now and his cultivation was probably slightly inferior, and yet he had only needed thirty minutes to pass

through that path?

Gou Hanshi explained, "Senior Brother has been learning the sword at this mountain since he was a child, and it was not his first attempt on that sword path. He naturally had a few advantages."

The disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect knew of their second brother's way of doing things and were not surprised to see him speak on Chen Changsheng's behalf.

It was Tang Thirty-Six that didn't know how to respond.

Zhexiu ignored these words, heading straight to the path.

Those sword intents seeping out from the ivy on the stone wall floated about his body, instantly ripping through his clothes.

But he did not care. His face remained unmoved.

The disciples and Tang Thirty-Six watched.

Many people had already guessed that Chen Changsheng would be able to break through this path, as he cultivated in the path of Mount Li's sword.

But what of this infamous wolf expert?

He was the real main character of this affair.

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To Chen Changsheng, walking this path was a battle.

To Zhexiu, walking this path was a hunt.

From a certain perspective, Zhexiu had a rather savage aura.

As a hybrid of human and demi-human, his body was as hard as steel, his perception extremely powerful, his intelligence extremely high, his spiritual sense incredibly formidable, and his reserves of true essence incomparably vast.

As the Tide Rush of Blood worsened, his meridians thickened, his

spiritual sense grew fiercer, and his amount of true essence surged.

It was just like those monsters on the snowy plains. On the verge of death, they would become incomparably powerful.

Zhexiu was currently very powerful, and when Chen Changsheng was making his way through the path, he was observing like a true beast, not missing out on a single detail.

He was confident that he had already found the weak point of his prey, so now was the time to conserve his strength and cease all excess consumption of energy. He needed to charge straight over and bite through the throat of his target.

Pulling away the ivy, he walked into the path. He looked at the sword intents coming from both the earth and sky, but he did not take on a battle posture. "I didn't come to learn the sword from you, nor do I want to prove that I'm stronger than you. I just want to see her, and nobody can stop me."

He was saying this to the sword slashes on the walls of this passage, but he naturally wanted to say it for their owner to hear.

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The cries of countless swords soared to the sky, seemingly infuriated, but in a short while, they stopped.

The path was quiet. Whether it was Tang Thirty-Six on the cliff or Chen Changsheng at the other end of the path, everyone was nervous.

After not hearing any sword cries for a long time, Chen Changsheng understood and asked, "Is this that method?"

Qi Jian calmly explained, "The swords can sense your thoughts and are impossible to deceive. If you're sincere, you can send them a message. Since you're not an enemy, there's no reason to stop you."

Chen Changsheng asked, "Then what's the explanation for those sword cries? They were even more furious than the ones I encountered."

Qi Jian pursed her lips, appearing to not care. In truth, she was very nervous.

Footsteps approached.

Zhexiu emerged from the path.

Chapter 930 – The Ups and Downs, and the People of the Plains Are Just as Before

Zhexiu appeared much worse off than Chen Changsheng had imagined. His body that was as hard as metal was covered in wounds and caked in dust.

Chen Changsheng took a handkerchief from his sleeve and passed it over as he curiously asked, "How did you make it through?"

Zhexiu expressionlessly said, "Not countering if struck, not retorting if taunted, only walking forward."

Chen Changsheng wondered, "This way is also fine?"

Zhexiu replied, "Perhaps he might have just killed me."

Chen Changsheng commented, "...This doesn't match up with your personality."

Zhexiu answered, "It can change."

As a child, he had been regarded as a devil and exiled from his tribe. He struggled between life and death, fighting for survival.

Zhexiu had never been somebody that cared about the gazes of others, much less what the word 'normal' meant. He had a most cold and frigid personality.

But for certain reasons, he was willing to change himself, even if this ran counter to his nature and his strongest habits.

For example, he took the handkerchief from Chen Changsheng and diligently wiped the dirt off his face.

After a while, he earnestly asked Chen Changsheng, "Is it clean now?"

Chen Changsheng looked for a while, then said, "It's good enough."

Zhexiu glanced at his clothes, which had been shredded by sword intent, and requested, "I know that you keep a lot of clothes with you. Lend me a set."

"I made a few sets of clothes when I had nothing else to do. In a little while, you can see if any of them fit you."

Qi Jian's voice came from behind Chen Changsheng.

Her voice was very soft and was trembling somewhat.

Chen Changsheng moved aside.

Upon seeing this girl dressed in green, Zhexiu froze.

Qi Jian nervously looked at him.

Silence.

It had been many years since they last met.

It was somewhat unfamiliar.

It was somewhat uncomfortable.

He was still the same.

She was now a lady.

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Qi Jian raised her skirt and bowed.

As Su Li's daughter and the Sect Master's last disciple, she was Mount Li's Junior Sister, possessing the most unique of identities.

She rarely bowed to others, so her actions were somewhat clumsy.

Zhexiu clasped his hands and bowed back. His actions were even more awkward, as he had never bowed to anyone before.

The mood was somewhat stiff.

The two silently gazed at each other, neither knowing how to

start.

"I don't have much time," Zhexiu suddenly said.

Qi Jian knew that his illness was in the midst of worsening, but upon hearing his words, she thought his attitude was still the same as always, so she couldn't help but be a little angry.

But Zhexiu added, "So I want to cherish my time a little more."

Startled, Qi Jian asked, "What do you want to do?"

Zhexiu firmly said, "I want to hug you."

Qi Jian blushed, not knowing how to respond.

Zhexiu somewhat clumsily spread his arms wide.

Qi Jian almost wanted to cry as she said, "I want you to carry me."

Zhexiu turned around and squatted down in front of her.

Qi Jian leaned on his back, tightly hugged his neck, and then began to cry.

"Don't cry," Zhexiu said in concern.

Feeling aggrieved, Qi Jian replied, "I want to cry."

Zhexiu thought about what to do, then asked, "Where do you live?"

Qi Jian nervously asked, "What do you want to do?"

Zhexiu answered, "Didn't you say that you had made me some new sets of clothes?"

Leaning on his back, Qi Jian lightly snorted and said, "Who said that those clothes were for you?"

Zhexiu laughed, saying nothing.

Qi Jian whispered, "South, at the Zhen Star, four li."

Zhexiu froze, then slowly closed his eyes.

He carried her as he ran in that direction.

There was a large plain of grass in that direction. Beneath the sunlight, it appeared like a field of wheat, rustling with golden waves.

It looked just like the plains in the Garden of Zhou.

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After retreating, Chen Changsheng endeavored to keep as quiet as possible so as to not disturb the pair.

Soon after, he realized that he was overthinking it, as Zhexiu and Qi Jian clearly only had eyes for each other, oblivious to any bystanders.

Or else how could Zhexiu, famed for his vigilance, not hear the many footsteps and voices?

Qiushan Jun, Tang Thirty-Six, and the other disciples walked out of the path and to Chen Changsheng's side.

Just like Qi Jian said, there were many methods to pass through the path, and the disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect naturally had ways to calm those sword intents.

They had arrived just when Zhexiu was clumsily opening his arms with the intent of hugging Qi Jian.

Tang Thirty-Six gave a hearty laugh. "Just when did this fellow want to pretend to be Xuanyuan Po?"

Qiushan Jun arched his brows.

Gou Hanshi shook his head.

Guan Feibai's face turned into a sheet of ice.

Liang Banhu silently creased his brow.

Bai Cai almost cursed.

Their beloved junior sister was suddenly about to be embraced in the bosom of another man. Anyone who saw this sight would assuredly be in a terrible mood.

Even if they were gentle, noble Gou Hanshi or the lofty and far-sighted Qiushan Jun.

Zhexiu carried Qi Jian off into the verdant valley.

Guan Feibai and the rest appeared slightly appeased.

Chen Changsheng walked over to Qiushan Jun and said, "Thank you."

Qiushan Jun pointed down to the valley and said, "If it's about this matter, then there's no need."

There were naturally people who sympathized and pitied their junior sister, and he was one of them, but it was also a falsehood to say that he sincerely wanted these lovers to become husband and wife.

So he said that there was no need.

However, Chen Changsheng was not referring to this matter.

"I heard that before Senior Su Li left, he left you a letter, but you didn't accept it."

Chen Changsheng continued, "When I was passing through the path, I understood the meaning of this action."

Qiushan Jun replied, "I didn't have any deeper meaning behind my actions. I just didn't like Martial Granduncle's conduct back then, so I refused it out of anger."

Chen Changsheng fell quiet for a few moments, then agreed, "Senior's conduct truly was rather irresponsible. I also don't approve."

"Everyone says that I'm very similar to Senior Su Li. Presumably, if I met him, I would find him rather likable."

Tang Thirty-Six regretfully said, "Alas, we were not fated to meet, or else Senior would definitely have passed on something nice to me."

Guan Feibai sneered, "Why don't you go look in a mirror?"

Tang Thirty-Six arched his brows and shot back, "I look at myself in the mirror when I wake up every morning. It's quite the spirited and handsome face. Are you saying that your martial granduncle is very ugly?"

In witty remarks, all the disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect added together were not his match.

Gou Hanshi ordered Guan Feibai to stop and said to Chen Changsheng, "Your Holiness the Pope used the sword to break through the path. According to the rules, Your Holiness can now be considered a part of my Mount Li."

A normal cultivator would have been more than willing to be considered a disciple of the mighty Mount Li Sword Sect.

But Chen Changsheng was not a normal person and his status was even more revered. Not even the status of the Mount Li Sword Sect Master could compare.

Gou Hanshi was just informing him with no other meaning. In his view, Chen Changsheng naturally would not accept.

This truly was the case. Although Chen Changsheng had no conflict with the Mount Li Sword Sect and had developed deep relationships with them over the last few years, even having a rather congenial relationship with Gou Hanshi, he was still the Pope. He could not possibly enter the Mount Li Sword Sect, as what would the priests of the Li Palace do then?

Chen Changsheng answered, "We've always walked the same path, so we naturally belong to the same sect as well."

Gou Hanshi praised, "There's truth to these words."

At this moment, Qi Jian's happy laughter came from the plains on the perimeter of the valley.

As they watched that clear trail of dust rising from the plains and those two figures at the front of it, everyone felt rather emotional.

Chen Changsheng and Qiushan Jun shook their heads and said at the same time, "I really don't know just what that fellow was really thinking."

At these words, everyone fell quiet.

Everyone knew that the fellow they were speaking of was Su Li, but this silence was not because of the disrespect in their words.

Gou Hanshi looked at Chen Changsheng and Qiushan Jun in surprise. "The two of you share quite the tacit understanding."

Everyone else was staring at them.

Chen Changsheng and Qiushan Jun glanced at each other. Then, with a tacit understanding, they turned around and stopped talking.

Chapter 931 – Parting Is Only a Letter Away

On the same night, the Mount Li Sword Sect arranged a dinner in the valley, using a bonfire to roast meat.

This sort of treatment for someone like the Pope was inevitably a little disrespectful.

Chen Changsheng had no objection. He knew that it was because Qi Jian was somewhat shy and unwilling to leave the valley and meet so many of her fellow disciples.

Moreover, roasting meat over the fire had a rustic charm which he found quite pleasant. However, it reminded him of that night roasting meat and drinking wine at Sloping Cliff Horse Farm. He realized that Qiushan Jun had not appeared, causing him to feel a rather complex mixture of emotions.

Tang Thirty-Six had a bowl of wine in hand as he chatted with Ye Xiaolian, amusing her so much that she was shaking from laughter.

Gou Hanshi and Hu Thirty-Two were seated together, engaging in whispered discussion. They were probably planning how to handle some important matters in the future.

Guan Feibai and Bai Cai were sitting at Chen Changsheng's side, their eyes fixed in front of them, their bodies not even flinching.

On the other side of the bonfire, Zhexiu and Qi Jian were sitting together.

Qi Jian leaned on his shoulder, the smile on her face appearing particularly happy in the light of the fire.

The new clothes Zhexiu was wearing were very eye-catching. It was easy to see that the skill of the tailor was rather mediocre, but the dense needlework was proof of how much effort and thought had been put into them.

Chen Changsheng was rather gratified to see this sight, but Guan Feibai and the others felt awful, leading to their quick departure from the valley. Ye Xiaolian soon followed after them.

On this quiet night, the fire crackled in the wind. Qi Jian leaned on Zhexiu's shoulder, softly humming a little tune.

Chen Changsheng looked around him, then with a thought, he brought Nanke out of the Garden of Zhou.

Upon seeing Nanke suddenly appear by the fire, Qi Jian became nervous, her hands subconsciously going for the sword at her waist.

"You should be calling her Aunt. There's no need to be so nervous," Chen Changsheng said.

Qi Jian blankly stared for a while before getting his meaning. She gazed at Nanke's face, her mood complex.

Tang Thirty-Six's gaze moved between Nanke and Qi Jian, ultimately falling on Chen Changsheng as he said, "I feel like this sort of seniority is a little messy."

Chen Changsheng ignored him as he told Qi Jian his intentions.

In the following days, Nanke would also be living in Mount Li, and he hoped that Qi Jian would help take care of her.

Upon confirming that this matter had received the Sect Master's silent approval, Qi Jian naturally had no reason to object.

Leaving Nanke at the Mount Li Sword Sect was a decision Chen Changsheng had reached after long and careful deliberation.

His first priority was Nanke's safety. Wuqiong Bi's questions at Holy Maiden Peak were still ringing in his ear, and if she was not at his side, only the Mount Li Sword Sect was able and willing to accept a Demon Princess. In addition, the Mount Li Sword Sect's Just Sword's Clear Music might assist in recovering Nanke's intelligence.

One could be treated as easily as two. In any case, since Zhexiu needed to remain at Mount Li to treat his illness, Nanke might as well stay here as well.

As Chen Changsheng and Qi Jian conversed, Nanke blankly stared at him, perplexed as to why they needed to part.

Just like in the last few days, she clung to his clothes, though this time with more force.

Looking into her eyes, Chen Changsheng felt a little depressed, but there was nothing he could do. Only after softly coaxing her for some time did he succeed in having Nanke loosen her grip.

Qi Jian had been watching the entire time. She suddenly very seriously said, "I have no intention of calling you Uncle."

Chen Changsheng froze while Tang Thirty-Six's laughter could be heard deep in the plains on the edge of the valley, startling countless birds.

"My father also would never want to call you his brother-in-law."

Qi Jian glanced at Nanke quietly sitting at Chen Changsheng's side and said, "Can you not be like this?"

Chen Changsheng had always had a gentle personality, but now he could not hide his displeasure. "Just what's going on? I haven't even done anything."

Qi Jian said, "You understand what I mean."

Zhexiu added, "Her meaning is that you shouldn't treat other girls too well."

Tang Thirty-Six said, "Do you think that Chen Changsheng doesn't know? He's well aware, which is why he's gotten angry out of embarrassment."

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Their business at Mount Li finished, Chen Changsheng and his party bid farewell early next morning and returned on their original path.

Still nobody knew what was happening in White Emperor City. There was a shadow over his heart that caused him a great deal of concern.

He arranged to meet Xu Yourong in the village at the base of Holy Maiden Peak. He was confident that the latest report would have arrived by then.

They would decide what to do then.

The morning light had just touched the verdant mountains, so the wind on the Tong River was somewhat chilly.

Chen Changsheng looked at the village on the opposite shore. He knew that Xu Yourong was already there, which improved his mood slightly.

At this moment, a cry came from the sky as a Red Goose streaked out of the clouds to his north and landed in front of him.

Hu Thirty-Two untied the letter box from the Red Goose's foot. He followed the stipulated methods and removed a token, taking the letter from within and handing it to Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng's expression did not change as his eyes moved across the dense passage on the letter, but everyone could sense that he had become rather nervous, and also angry.

The grass along the Tong River was covered in light layer of frost, just like the mood in his eyes.

Chen Changsheng took a sheet of paper and jotted down a few hasty sentences for Ye Xiaolian to give to Xu Yourong across the river. "I have an urgent matter, so I'll leave first."

After saying this, he immediately boarded a carriage that had been prepared in advance by the Daoist church of the south. The

carriage quickly galloped off along the official road running along the western shore of the Tong River, its ultimate direction to the north.

Ye Xiaolian was clueless as to what had happened. She walked across the water to meet Xu Yourong. When delivering the letter, she could not conceal her concern.

By now, Xu Yourong already knew what had happened, and she was not angry at Chen Changsheng's sudden departure. However, when she saw what was written on the letter, she couldn't help but feel a little displeased.

"Go if you have to, and I won't say anything. But riding my crane to see another girl? That's a little too much."

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As one followed the course of the Tong River northward, one arrived at the eastern foothills of the Luomei Mountains. Chen Changsheng's party arrived at the southernmost county of the Great Zhou Dynasty: Luling County.

When their carriage entered the Prince of Luling's estate, the sun had just risen over the trees, from which one could tell how rushed they had been.

Tang Thirty-Six and Hu Thirty-Two felt thoroughly exhausted, and also just as curious. Someone had been sending Chen Changsheng letters ever since he had left Sloping Cliff Horse Farm, with all of the Li Palace's plans related to these letters. Just who was the writer of this letter? Why did Chen Changsheng trust these letters so, and what was in today's letter that made Chen Changsheng so anxious? It even reminded them of Chen Changsheng's mood in Fengyang City upon learning that there was something strange going on in Holy Maiden Peak.

To Chen Changsheng, just who in the world had a similar status

to Xu Yourong?

Tang Thirty-Six and Hu Thirty-Two did not find an answer in the Prince of Luling's estate, and the person waiting for them was not the Prince of Luling, but... the Prince of Louyang.

This most useless prince of the Chen clan appeared greatly fatigued and covered in dust. He had probably just hurried down from the north.

Seeing Chen Changsheng come in, the Prince of Louyang hurriedly prostrated, his knees hitting the ground and his rear snapping into the air as he adopted an extremely deferential posture.

Chapter 932 – A Letter from Shang Xingzhou

Tang Thirty-Six was rather startled to see the Prince of Louyang prostrate. Even if Chen Changsheng was the Pope and the prince was most cowardly, what need was there for such respect?

Chen Changsheng became somewhat absentminded as he looked at the Prince of Louyang's clumsy movements and cumbersome body. Whatever he was thinking, it made it so that he did not immediately have the prince rise.

Tang Thirty-Six once more felt that something was wrong. It was obvious that Chen Changsheng had a problem with this prince's attitude or mentality.

Amongst the princes of the Chen clan, the Prince of Louyang was the most low-key and obedient. No matter how fierce the conflict between the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy, he had always maintained a respectful attitude toward the Li Palace, his actions just now proof of this fact. Logically speaking, Chen Changsheng's personality and demeanor would not make him treat this prince so coldly, no matter how little he was acquainted with this prince.

Not hearing Chen Changsheng's voice made the Prince of Louyang extremely nervous. While profusely sweating, he aimed a pitiful glance at Tang Thirty-Six.

Tang Thirty-Six lightly poked Chen Changsheng on the back, upon which Chen Changsheng finally came to his senses and hurriedly had the Prince of Louyang rise.

The Prince of Louyang gave a deep sigh and quickly took out a thin letter from his bosom. Like he was offering a treasure of his clan, he very carefully placed the letter in front of Chen Changsheng.

Hu Thirty-Two saw the seal on the letter and confirmed that it

was not from the same person that wrote the letter from this morning and the ones from the past. So just who had written this letter?

The paper decorations pasted on the windows were numerous and varied, seeming almost real. The light passing through them into the room was greatly weakened, becoming rather gloomy.

Chen Changsheng gazed at the seal on the letter, pausing for a moment before smoothly opening the envelope.

It had been many years since he had seen this handwriting, but it was still so familiar, just like the writer.

The brushstrokes were smooth and flowing, like the stream outside the village. The words were elegant and charming but concealed a powerful vigor, like a solitary mountain within the mists.

Chen Changsheng read the first line of words, his complexion growing slightly dark.

As expected, the news relayed to him by the letter from this morning was true.

His brow creased and remained so.

Tang Thirty-Six and Hu Thirty-Two looked at him, using their gazes to inquire as to what was going on.

"This is a letter Teacher wrote to me."

Chen Changsheng explained.

This answer shocked the pair into speechlessness while the Prince of Louyang incessantly wiped the cold sweat off his face. The room was quiet, the entirety of the Prince of Luling's estate shrouded in silence.

The Imperial Court and the Li Palace, Shang Xingzhou and Chen Changsheng, had been at odds for several years, the situation between them extremely tense.

All of a sudden, Shang Xingzhou had written a letter to his student. What did he want?

It naturally wasn't because he had drunk two pots of wine last night and suddenly wanted to see the Moon of the demons, thus deciding to turn his hostility toward his student into friendship.

It could only be because something extremely important was happening on the continent.

This event was even more important than the conflict between the Orthodoxy and the Imperial Court.

It was so important that even someone as clear-minded and powerful as Shang Xingzhou had put his aside his problems with Chen Changsheng and sought his aid.

Shang Xingzhou's letter was simple and concise. Chen Changsheng quickly finished reading it and thanked the Prince of Louyang for his troubles.

The Prince of Louyang was elated, but he didn't know what he should do next, so he blankly stood where he was.

Tang Thirty-Six winked at him.

The Prince of Louyang quickly responded, bowing as he retreated out of the room.

After he left, Tang Thirty-Six immediately asked, "Just what's happened?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "White Emperor City will be holding the grand ceremony of Heavenly Selection."

Tang Thirty-Six found the words 'Heavenly Selection' to be somewhat familiar, but he had forgotten where he had heard them or what they meant.

On the other hand, Hu Thirty-Two's expression suddenly changed as he sternly said, "Preposterous! Just what are the demi-humans thinking?"

It was only after listening to Hu Thirty-Two's explanation that Tang Thirty-Six finally understood the meaning of the Heavenly Selection ceremony, and his expression turned solemn.

"The one Princess Luoluo chooses to marry will become the next White Emperor?"

"Correct."

Tang Thirty-Six asked Chen Changsheng, "Didn't you already take care of her meridians? Why can't she succeed to the throne of the White Emperor?"

Chen Changsheng silently thought for a few moments before saying, "It's naturally because there's someone that doesn't want her to become the next White Emperor."

Tang Thirty-Six understood who he was referring and asked in confusion, "Madam Mu is her mother by blood. How does doing this benefit her?"

Hu Thirty-Two's concerns were on another question. "Who is Madam Mu prepared to marry Princess Luoluo off to?"

Chen Changsheng recalled the contents of the letter he had received this morning and said, "There are many rumors in White Emperor City, but right now it seems that the groom should be the Second Prince of the Great Western Continent."

"The evil intentions of the Great Western Continent's Imperial clan are truly undying," Hu Thirty-Two harshly said. "The blue-clothed visitor only died two days ago and here they are again with this sort of move."

"Madam Mu has been married to the White Emperor for several centuries now, and it's said that those two have always loved each other. Who could have known that her heart had always been on the clan of her parents? She's even willing to deprive her daughter of any benefits. In the past, I thought that such deceiving wives existed only in a few uncivilized and remote villages. I truly didn't

think..."

Tang Thirty-Six was deeply annoyed.

Confused, Hu Thirty-Two asked, "How can the White Emperor agree to her actions?"

Chen Changsheng noted, "His Majesty the White Emperor is still in secluded cultivation, so no one knows his thoughts on the matter."

Tang Thirty-Six suddenly felt that something was not right about this matter.

The scheme of the Great Western Continent's from a few days ago clearly had the Imperial Court and Shang Xingzhou's backing.

To put it another way, it had always been an alliance between Shang Xingzhou and Madam Mu so that they could remove Chen Changsheng.

If Madam Mu wanted to use this chance to forge a marriage alliance and have the Great Western Continent's Imperial clan successfully make landfall on the continent, Shang Xingzhou should have been wishing them the best, so why this fierce opposition?

Shang Xingzhou had written this letter to Chen Changsheng naturally with the hopes that he could ruin this grand ceremony that would inaugurate the Great Western Continent's return to their homeland.

Chen Changsheng was the best candidate for stopping the marriage alliance between White Emperor City and the Great Western Continent. His status was sufficiently revered and he had a very unique relationship with the Demi-human race.

In this matter, he was more useful than Shang Xingzhou.

The problem was that Shang Xingzhou was the de facto ruler of the world and Chen Changsheng was the student that he wanted

most dearly to die, so the two had an extremely complicated relationship. It had assuredly been no easy task for him to write this letter to Chen Changsheng, a decision only taken after long and careful deliberation. The more difficult the task, the more it was evident how strong his stance on this subject was. Why did he have such a strong stance that he was even willing to seek aid from his student, even if this would cause him to yield some ground to his student in the future?

"Black Robe is not in Xuelao City."

Chen Changsheng added, "Moreover, twenty-some days ago, the Demon Palace held a ceremony to the stars. It caused quite a stir, but it's still not clear what it was for."

Hu Thirty-Two understood what this meant, and his face paled.

Tang Thirty-Six also turned grave.

If Shang Xingzhou's judgment was not wrong, the Human race was about to face its most dangerous situation since the siege of Luoyang a thousand years ago.

Everyone thought that Luoluo might be married off to the Second Prince of the Great Western Continent, but what if she wasn't?

What if White Emperor City planned to form a marriage alliance with another person?

What if this person came from the north?

Chapter 933 – One Temple Rules the World

—Xining?

Tang Thirty-Six looked into Chen Changsheng's eyes and asked with great solemnity, "You trust your teacher?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "Master's intelligence is unparalleled and his insight sharp. Not even Black Robe can conceal everything in the heavens. I trust that Master's judgment is correct."

Tang Thirty-Six said, "You know that's not what I mean."

Chen Changsheng silently thought, then said, "To Master, killing me and subduing the Orthodoxy is the most important matter, but exterminating the Demon race and uniting the continent under the Human race is his lifelong desire, the ideal that he will pursue until the end of his days. I have absolute confidence in this."

In the history of the continent, the most momentous change was the alliance between the humans and demi-humans.

It was on this foundation that Emperor Taizong was able to successfully lead the allied armies north and force the demons back to the blizzard-ridden wastes.

In the ensuing several hundred years, the Human race gained enough time to recover and grew stronger and stronger, until eventually, the Demon race found it far more difficult to sweep into the south once more.

If the demi-humans suddenly broke their pact with the humans and changed sides, what would happen?

Shang Xingzhou and Chen Changsheng did not have a conflict of ideals, but a conflict of Daos.

Chen Changsheng was the only flaw in Shang Xingzhou's Dao, so Shang Xingzhou had to think of a way to wipe out his existence.

But this was nothing compared to this matter.

It was just like Shang Xingzhou said in his letter.

White Emperor City could not be lost.

Tang Thirty-Six revealed an extremely rare earnestness as he said, "Then we must stop this from happening."

Fortunately, this was only speculation and had not yet come true.

The humans still had time to react.

If not for Shang Xingzhou and his extremely sharp senses perceiving these problems and making this bold and forceful conclusion, the result would have been disastrous.

When he thought of this, Tang Thirty-Six felt an irrepressible respect towards the venerable Daoist, even though they were on different sides.

Chen Changsheng walked to the window and raised the Stainless Sword. Though he used the Intellectual Sword to silently calculate for quite some time, he still failed to obtain an unambiguous answer.

"The demi-humans... will they really ally with the demons?"

In the history books, the relationship between the demi-humans and demons was full of bloodstains and the tragic circumstances of the demi-humans.

There was no logical reason for the demi-humans to forget these grudges, much less ally with the demons.

Hu Thirty-Two said, "In truth, it's not completely impossible. Don't forget, a thousand years ago, the relationship between the humans and demi-humans was also terrible. If the demons are willing to pay the appropriate price to pacify the hatred of the demi-humans, the demi-humans really might defect to their side."

Tang Thirty-Six noted, "It's a question of motive. If Madam Mu is taking these risks for the Great Western Continent, how can the ministers and generals of the Demi-human race just agree?"

Hu Thirty-Two's gaze fell on the letter in Chen Changsheng's hand, and he said, "Perhaps it's precisely for this reason."

Tang Thirty-Six followed his gaze but still didn't understand.

"The demons have been in decline for one thousand years. Even with the accession of a new Demon Lord, it will be impossible for them to recover their terrifying strength in a short time. On the other hand, our Human race has been getting stronger and stronger in the last one thousand years. It's just as the blue-clothed visitor on the summit ruefully sighed about: our side has far too many genius experts."

Hu Thirty-Two looked at Chen Changsheng and seriously said, "Your Holiness said before that the esteemed Daoist has always wanted to inherit Emperor Taizong's dying wish, exterminating the demons and uniting the world. When the time comes, where will the demi-humans go? Will they become subjects and offer tribute, or will it be like it was in ancient times, where they were slaves to the demons?"

Tang Thirty-Six said, "The current White Emperor is an overlord. Does he not even have a little confidence?"

Hu Thirty-Two fell quiet, then said, "In the last few years, a phrase has been going around the continent."

Startled, Chen Changsheng asked, "What phrase?"

Hu Thirty-Two said, "A temple of Xining rules the world."

Both Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six fell silent.

The meaning of this phrase was crystal-clear. It referred to the story of the last ten-some years and of this current period of history.

Then if one looked into the future, what would they see?

If Shang Xingzhou and Chen Changsheng made amends, then together with the emperor, the three would unite their strengths.

Who on the continent could stand up to the Human race then?

Even the White Emperor would undoubtedly feel a fierce apprehension and unease when looking at this teacher and his two disciples from Xining Village's temple.

It was fine if such a matter was impossible, but many people believed that the problems between Shang Xingzhou and Chen Changsheng should never have existed in the first place.

The White Emperor and other figures at his level might have even thought that the conflict between Shang Xingzhou and Chen Changsheng was a hoax created by the pair.

Chen Changsheng did not return Hu Thirty-Two's gaze, instead choosing to look back at the letter.

Shang Xingzhou had written four words at the end: 'Calmly observe these changes.'

Observation required his presence.

He said, "We should first take care of this matter."

Hu Thirty-Two said, "That's only to be expected. However, it's not known when White Emperor City will convene the Heavenly Selection ceremony. Since the Li Palace is appearing, the Orthodoxy needs to quickly form a diplomatic mission."

Chen Changsheng replied, "The date for the Heavenly Selection ceremony probably hasn't been set, but the intent of White Emperor City is clear. Even if they can't hide this matter forever, they wouldn't want us to suddenly interfere, so they won't give us a chance to make any plans. Thus, I will go ahead first while the diplomatic mission can hurry after me."

Hu Thirty-Two acknowledged, "Understood."

Tang Thirty-Six said, "I'll return to Wenshui first."

A great deal of the business with the demi-humans was under the purview of the Tang clan, and Wenshui City had always had an

excellent relationship with White Emperor City.

This matter involved the future of humanity, so the Tang Old Master naturally wouldn't remain uninvolved. He would most likely make the appropriate arrangements.

Chen Changsheng nodded. "I'll go first."

At this moment, the bright cry of a crane resounded in the skies above the estate.

The winter winds howled and the trees in the courtyard swayed as the White Crane landed.

The Prince of Louyang was at the faraway atrium of the building, kneeling to show respect as Chen Changsheng departed.

Tang Thirty-Six finally couldn't help but ask, "Why did the venerable Daoist have His Highness come to deliver the letter?"

Chen Changsheng explained, "Last night, His Highness was spending the winter in Mount Xiao, which was closest to this place."

Tang Thirty-Six thought to himself, this clearly isn't logical.

If the Imperial Court wanted to send a message, they could use Red Falcons, Red Geese, or even arrays to send it straight to the Prince of Luling's estate. There was no need to trouble the Prince of Louyang with this task.

Chen Changsheng knew that this reason had failed to convince him. After a moment's thought, he said, "Master knows that I trust him more."

Tang Thirty-Six was even more confused, wondering, why do you trust this prince famed for being a good-for-nothing?

Chen Changsheng mounted the crane and took flight, leaving no further explanation.

One man and one crane flew off into the distance, above the clouds.

The Tong River became the vague outline of a belt, the Luomei Mountains to the left and behind it like a miniature landscape.

In the far west were curling clouds and distant green mountains. He had no idea what was waiting for him there.

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Green mountains protruded out of a sea of clouds, the clouds like the mist on the opposite shore of a lake or the smoke rising from the chimneys of the capital on a winter morning.

Luoluo sat on a mountain slope, gazing at the mists below, her petite body appearing somewhat fragile and delicate.

If one looked at her from the front, they would presumably get this feeling, as although her beautiful face seemed to be recollecting the past, it was still very serene.

Guardian Li watched her with pity in her eyes. In her view, the princess had been very lonely these past few years, and she was only getting lonelier.

Chapter 934 – Someone Is Breaking Through the Clouds, Descending with the Light of the Sun

Luoluo asked, "Has Royal Mother left the palace again?"

Guardian Li whispered, "It seems like she has gone to the opposite shore."

Luoluo asked, "Aunt returned a few days ago?"

Guardian Li answered, "Presumably."

Luoluo asked, "The incident at South Stream Temple was true?"

Guardian Li hesitated, but she still responded in the affirmative.

Luoluo fell quiet for a while, then said, "Then they really do want to harm Teacher."

Upon hearing these words and sensing the emotions in her voice, Guardian Li did not dare respond.

"I didn't think that the legend of New North Bridge was true and that Teacher has known that black dragon this entire time."

Luoluo gazed at the vague shape of the green mountain deep within the mists and said, "But where is Mother keeping her right now?"

Guardian Li whispered, "It's not possible to investigate."

Luoluo sighed. "Aren't I very useless?"

Guardian Li did not know how to respond. Although the princess was one of the most noble existences in White Emperor City, how could she influence the actions of the Empress?

Luoluo suddenly rallied herself, a happy expression appearing on her bright and pretty face. "But it doesn't matter. Teacher said before that living is the most important. It doesn't matter if we're

useful or not, only if we can live according to our hearts or not, if we can live happily."

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On another cliff in the sea of clouds, there was also a petite figure, but this one did not seem weak or fragile. Perhaps because she had never experienced hardship as a child or had been educated differently, Mu Jiushi always had self-confidence written all over her beautiful little face, making her seem bright and cheerful with an intimidating aura of nobility.

Madam Mu could naturally tell that her younger sister was in a very depressed mood and was only pretending to not care.

She walked to the edge of the cliff and embraced Mu Jiushi, tenderly saying, "It truly is difficult to be a woman of the Mu clan."

These words and the warmth of her older sister's body made it impossible for Mu Jiushi to keep pretending. Burying herself in her sister's chest, she sorrowfully said, "I don't even know when that fellow started following us. Sister, aren't I too useless?"

She was naturally referring to Qiushan Jun.

Madam Mu said, "Imperial Uncle's scheme was flawed from the start, so how can you be blamed?"

Mu Jiushi raised her head, a confused expression on her face. "Flawed?"

Madam Mu explained, "Even if there was no Qiushan Jun and everyone on the plateau believed that Zhusha killed Bie Tianxin, so what? Imperial Uncle wanted to use Zhusha's name to burn Chen Changsheng, but he never thought about the fact that the Pope of the Human race is not so easy to kill."

Mu Jiushi had not gone to South Stream Temple, but she was well aware of the events that had taken place on the plateau. Her

eyes wide, she said, "But Chen Changsheng really did almost die there."

Madam Mu shook her head. "From the start, Shang Xingzhou was using Imperial Uncle, but he never had any intentions of personally taking part. Didn't you see how the Prince of Xiang never once struck, just stood on the sidelines like a bystander? And only someone as idiotic as White Tiger would strike before the conclusion was clear."

Surprised, Mu Jiushi asked, "Wasn't the Prince of Xiang not attacking to intimidate Wang Po?"

Madam Mu replied, "As someone who's already crossed that threshold, every action of his has a deeper meaning. How could he be swayed by external forces?"

This made Mu Jiushi think, didn't Imperial Uncle die for nothing then? With hatred in her voice, she spat, "The people of Zhou are truly crafty and sinister."

Madam Mu reminded her, "An undertaking of a thousand years should never suffer from a moment's impatience. It was only because the esteemed Imperial Uncle's life was reaching its end that he took such a risk, hoping to see if he could get a little lucky. But you and I do not need to be so impatient. Once matters on this side are taken care of, we can make new plans."

Mu Jiushi thought about the grand undertaking her older sister was speaking of and couldn't help but get excited. "But I'm just worried that Sister will be here alone and without allies."

Madam Mu smiled. "I'm not a solitary recluse like Tianhai."

Mu Jiushi was still worried, saying, "But this is truly too grand of an undertaking. The demi-humans and demons have irreconcilable grudges, so how did you manage to convince the elders and ministers?"

Madam Mu explained, "It would naturally be challenging to pull

off this feat in the past, but now is actually the best opportunity. Shang Xingzhou's ambitions are too blatant. Everyone knows that he wants to unite the world and everyone knows that he has this ability. Chen Changsheng himself is an outstanding genius with lofty prestige, and that emperor is also extraordinary. If the teacher joins with his two disciples, let alone the demons, how can your sister's husband and those elders and ministers not worry?"

Mu Jiushi argued, "The venerable Daoist is certainly scary, and Chen Changsheng... he's also not bad, but that emperor spends all his time in the palace. It's hard to see anything unusual about him."

Madam Mu replied, "One who is skilled in war has no fame and the skill of a shepherd can be seen by observing the growth of the flock. Since that emperor began reigning, the Imperial Court has been well ordered, every talented person being utilized. Government affairs proceed smoothly and the people are peaceful and working happily. He's even better than his mother, on par with Emperor Taizong."

Mu Jiushi fell into deep thought, saying, "So that was how it was."

Then she remembered another matter, asking in concern, "Then what of Wuqiong Bi and Bie Yanghong? Once they recover from their injuries, they'll assuredly come by to take revenge in a few days."

Madam Mu replied, "No, you are wrong."

Puzzled, Mu Jiushi asked, "Could they be afraid of Sister's majesty and the demi-human experts and so don't dare to come?"

Madam Mu gazed into the sea of clouds and indifferently said, "When I said you were wrong, I did not mean that they would not come, but that they are already here."

As she spoke, thunder clapped in the sky.

Boom! The sea of clouds began to roil, spreading in all directions, but not tearing open. In the gloomy and wet forests within the clouds, countless monsters ran for their lives. In the slightly turbid waters of the Red River, ten-some massive aquatic monsters roared and lowered their heads.

The sea of clouds was pulled outwards, causing the center to become thinner and thinner until a hole appeared.

The light of the sun spilled through this hole, along with two figures.

This was a most beautiful and mystical sight.

Mu Jiushi's expression suddenly changed as she watched these two figures land on a nearby green mountain to the west. Madam Mu remained calm and silent, her thoughts a mystery.

Chapter 935 – Using a Mountain to Imprison a Dragon

The ones breaking through the clouds were Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi.

The dust of eighty thousand li had been utterly blown away by the high-altitude winds, but such winds had failed to scatter the weight and solemnity in their eyes.

After leaving Holy Maiden Peak, they had taken a little time to regulate their breathing. However, they had not waited for their injuries to fully recover before rushing over to White Emperor City.

Even as experts of the Divine Domain, they had paid no small price to accomplish this feat. Their complexions were somewhat pale and they seemed rather fatigued.

Standing on the green mountain, Bie Yanghong assessed his surroundings. With the slightest focus, his eyes could clearly make out everything that happened for several dozen li.

Across the river, White Emperor City was in turmoil, a sign that the demi-humans had noticed their arrival and were rushing to mobilize their troops and experts.

Bie Yanghong raised his right hand and spread apart his fingers.

Several deep blue ice crystals, exuding a boundless chill, drifted out of his palm. Though the wind blew upon them, they did not float away with the wind.

Those crystals of ice weightlessly drifted towards somewhere behind the mountain.

Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi followed.

In a short while, they saw a massive tree that soared more than a thousand zhang into the sky, piercing through the clouds and to

the beyond.

The tree was so thick that standing in front of it made one feel like it was a city wall. At the base of the tree was a cave, and in the cave, a little house had been built.

A black-clothed girl sat on a stone stool within the house. With her chin on her hands, she seemed rather depressed.

Those blue crystals rushed over to her in streams of light as if they were family.

The girl noticed and raised her head.

The ice crystals bored into the red birthmark between her eyebrows and vanished.

The black-clothed girl saw Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi appear behind those icy crystals, and wariness appeared on her cold and beautiful face.

She was a proud and powerful dragon, but she could clearly sense that these two human experts had the ability to harm her.

Bie Yanghong's gaze dropped to the girl's feet. Seeing the chain, he slightly frowned.

Wuqiong Bi's complexion turned extremely nasty upon seeing the black-clothed girl. In her thinking, even if Bie Tianxin's death had nothing to do with the girl, he had still died to her dragon breath. Just when she was prepared to vent her spleen, she was stopped by Bie Yanghong's stern gaze.

"Lady Zhusha, I will think of a method to save you," Bie Yanghong said to the black-clothed girl.

This black-clothed girl was naturally the legend of New North Bridge and Pope Chen Changsheng's Protector.

She had many names. Chen Changsheng liked to call her Zhizhi, but Bie Yanghong and other experts from his generation were used to calling her by the name Wang Zhice had bestowed upon her:

Zhusha.

The chain at the girl's foot confirmed to Bie Yanghong that the death of his son had nothing to do with her, as it was impossible for her to leave this mountain.

Since this was the case, he naturally had to think of a way to rescue her.

By now, Zhizhi had guessed at who Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi were.

In truth, it was because Bie Yanghong's red flower was far too famous, as were the nastiness of both Wuqiong Bi's complexion and her horsetail whisk.

She had been imprisoned on this mountain for quite some time, so she had begun to form a few conjectures. She had even sensed the death of a Divine Domain expert the day before yesterday. But in the end, she still did not know what exactly had happened, much less why two of the continent's experts would suddenly appear here.

She pondered Bie Yanghong's words, then said, "Then I'll have to thank you, though the task seems rather challenging."

Bie Yanghong's gaze continued down and he realized to his surprise that the chain on her ankle extended into the mountain.

This chain was apparently tied up to a rocky outcrop in the ground, but his formidable eyesight meant that he could see at a glance that this outcrop was actually the tip of a stone base, and this stone base rested on the very bottom of this mountain. To put it another way, this chain was tied to the entire mountain.

If he wanted to take away the little Black Dragon, he would either have to destroy the sturdy stone base or sever the connection between the chain and the stone base.

He could not do the former. Although the feat was possible if he displayed the full breadth of his cultivation, such an act would

produce too much activity and consume too much star radiance and true essence, greatly affecting his performance in the true battle. As for the latter... the Qi around where the chain and the stone base were connected was strange, like there was an invisible lock there.

Bie Yanghong slightly focused as he said, "Tiger Cage?"

Zhizhi replied, "I don't know what it's called, but this name isn't bad."

Bie Yanghong knew that he was right. The object that locked the chain to the stone base was assuredly the legendary imprisoning artifact of the demi-humans, the Tiger Cage.

This was the imprisoning artifact used by the White Emperor clan to punish its traitors. Even the innate divine strength of the White Emperor clan could not break free of the Tiger Cage, so it was ideal for imprisoning the little Black Dragon.

Even an expert at Bie Yanghong's level would find it extremely difficult to break the Tiger Cage.

However, since it was an imprisoning artifact, it had to have a key, and this key was undoubtedly in Madam Mu's hands.

"After I kill her, I will release you," Bie Yanghong said.

Zhizhi replied, "Then I truly can't thank you enough."

Bie Yanghong suddenly sensed something and turned to look at the sea of clouds.

A wind was rising from the sea, stirring waves in the clouds. In their unease, many seams appeared.

A meadow appeared in one of these seams, and on this meadow were two women. Bie Yanghong felt like the moisture and saltiness of the wind had suddenly increased in concentration.

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As he looked at the rather similar faces of Madam Mu and Mu Jiushi, Bie Yanghong paused for a moment, then clasped his hands in greeting.

Madam Mu calmly returned the gesture.

Wuqiong Bi naturally would not pay her any respect, nor did she speak. She only stared at Mu Jiushi, her eyes spitting venom, glowing with poisonous flames.

This loathing stare of an expert of the Divine Domain and her own guilty conscience over the murder of Bie Tianxin caused Mu Jiushi to shiver, despite her extraordinary origins and her proud personality. In fear, she hid behind Madam Mu.

Bie Yanghong asked Madam Mu, "Empress intends to protect her?"

Madam Mu replied, "This place is White Emperor City and she is my younger sister. Do you think I would let you touch her?"

Wuqiong Bi pointed at White Emperor City on the other side of the sea of clouds and yelled, "You think that you can rely on those silly fools amongst the demi-humans to stop this husband and wife?!"

Her voice was abnormally shrill, like two swords incessantly scraping against each other.

Compared to this, Bie Yanghong's voice was still had its usual warm and gentle tone, yet it seemed even more determined. "The White Emperor is in seclusion. You are alone."

Madam Mu calmly replied, "So the two of you did not mind worsening your injuries to hurry here as quickly as possible."

Bie Yanghong affirmed, "Yes. I had to ensure that no one could arrive before us."

Madam Mu's expression did not change as she asked, "You believe that as long as the Great Western Continent does not have time to

send reinforcements, I will have to confront a one-versus-two situation?"

Bie Yanghong again affirmed, "Correct. This is not a fair battle, but a father and mother taking revenge."

Madam Mu faintly smiled. "Then did you ever think that though my husband is in seclusion, he is not completely cut off from the world? If I'm really about to die, do you think he won't act? And even if you two work together, is your victory really assured?"

Chapter 936 – The Wind Blows the Shadow of the Tree into the Shape of a Black Robe

When Madam Mu spoke, her visage was serene and indifferent, making her seem incomparably confident and powerful.

She was a Princess of the Great Western Continent, the Empress of the Demi-humans, and she had been a Saint for many years.

Tianhai had died on the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, Yin had returned to the sea of stars, and the Holy Maiden of the south had followed Su Li to the distant Sacred Light Continent. Of the Five Saints, only she and the White Emperor remained.

She and the White Emperor were unquestionably two of the strongest people in the world.

Even though the White Emperor was in secluded cultivation and she had to fight Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi alone, her loss was not guaranteed.

And this wasn't even considering that this place was along the Red River, with countless demi-human experts residing in White Emperor City. With an order from her, they would come sweeping over like a tide.

"Empress, you have misunderstood."

Bie Yanghong said, "We have never held the extravagant hope of killing you. We only wish to take Mu Jiushi away and question her."

Mu Jiushi's small face paled at these words and she dared not respond.

Madam Mu smiled. "The two of you want to take away my younger sister and ask her what Young Master Bie's final words were, and then?"

Wuqiong Bi could no longer repress her feelings as she harshly

exclaimed, "If she cannot give an explanation, this old body will naturally tear her limb from limb!"

Madam Mu's smile faded as she gazed at Bie Yanghong. "Do you think I will agree?"

Bie Yanghong replied, "You should understand very well that I have the ability to delay you for a while. This period is enough for my wife to finish what she wants to do."

Madam Mu calmly stared at him for a long time. All of a sudden, she began to laugh.

The mountains and clouds echoed with her joyless laughter, suffused with determination and apathy.

"I think that Sir Bie has also misunderstood."

Madam Mu's laughter faded as she said, "I've never thought about protecting Little Shi."

Bie Yanghong's gaze turned stern. "Empress's meaning is?"

"Everyone says that I was exiled from the Great Western Continent by Imperial Uncle. For centuries, countless people thought that this was an injustice against me, like Tianhai or Old Yin. However, none of them knew that it was my ardent desire to leave and that all my skills were taught to me by Imperial Uncle. To me, Imperial Uncle was both teacher and father, the one that I respect the most."

Madam Mu expressionlessly declared, "You've killed him, so I naturally have to take revenge and kill all of you. I've never thought of doing anything else."

Bie Yanghong fell quiet.

With his and Wuqiong Bi's strength, although it was very difficult for them to kill, or even detain, Madam Mu, the opposite was true as well.

Unless she had a helper.

But who would help her?

The blue-clothed visitor was dead, the Great Western Continent's scheme exposed.

He and Wuqiong Bi were both Storms of the Human race and had come to exact vengeance for their son. Even Shang Xingzhou would not appear in these circumstances.

Moreover, they had come so quickly that they were confident that White Emperor City simply had not had the time to set any traps.

The sea breeze came in an unending stream from beyond, causing the clouds both in the sky and between the mountains to twist and writhe, but not disperse.

The hole that Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi had torn through the clouds was gradually covered and the sunlight shut out, casting the cliff into gloom.

A tree stood on the edge of the cliff, extremely tiny in comparison to the massive tree in which the little Black Dragon was imprisoned.

The tree had a shadow.

In such a dim light, this tree should have a very faint shadow, yet it was only getting darker.

The little red flower floating by his pinkie sensed something. It howled through the air, aiming at that tree in vigilance.

Bie Yanghong looked at Madam Mu and said, "Empress's ambition and boldness are truly terrifying."

"Imperial Uncle insisted on assassinating Chen Changsheng to stir internal discord in the Zhou Dynasty, but I knew that this was no easy task and was highly likely to fail."

Madam Mu calmly concluded, "This being the case, I naturally made a few backup plans."

Bie Yanghong sighed.

He had prepared for countless tricks beforehand, utilizing the will of the heavens for a long time to make many predictions, but to his surprise, he was still unable to surpass Madam Mu.

He said to Wuqiong Bi, "In a little while, if I can open up a path, you will leave. I will follow afterward."

Wuqiong Bi's heart went cold at these words. Just what had happened?

No matter how strong Madam Mu was, their working together should still have been enough to fight one battle. Why did he need to be so pessimistic, speaking of defeat before they had even begun to fight?

If this really was the case, why had they traveled over such a vast distance to come to White Emperor City?

Wuqiong Bi had a crude and ruthless temperament, but she was still an expert of the Divine Domain. Just a little thought was enough for her to understand what was going on. Her gaze fell on the tree at the edge of the cliff as well.

The shadow cast by the tree was getting darker and darker, gradually becoming like the color of ink, or perhaps a black curtain.

The breeze from the Western Sea rustled the leaves of the tree, shifting the shadow on the ground like it was blowing against a sleeve.

It was an actual sleeve.

The robe was black.

It was shaking in the wind.

A person appeared beneath the tree, their figure completely cloaked in a black robe.

Wuqiong Bi paled.

Bie Yanghong turned extremely grave, with an expression of unprecedented solemnity on his face.

He knew that this was the most dangerous moment the two had ever encountered in their lives.

They were about to face their most frightening opponent since the Tianhai Divine Empress.

The mountains were utterly silent, with not even the sound of wind.

The black robe shifting in the wind gave an abnormally sinister feeling.

Upon seeing this legendary Demon Military Advisor, Mu Jiushi felt a terrible fear and hid far away.

Bie Yanghong looked at Madam Mu and said, "You dared to collude with the demons? Does the White Emperor know? Do the demi-human elders?"

Madam Mu calmly answered, "You are the first to see it."

Bie Yanghong asked, "Did you ever think that if someone finds out about this, you will no longer be Empress?"

Madam Mu replied, "There's no need for you to worry about White Emperor City's affairs."

Bie Yanghong said, "Are you saying that you are confident that no bystanders will learn of this?"

It would be very difficult for him and Wuqiong Bi to kill or even defeat Madam Mu, but in the same way, it was also very difficult for Madam Mu to kill this couple.

Even though Madam Mu was a Saint, even though she had invited the most mysterious and terrifying Demon Military Advisor to assist her today.

To kill an expert of the Divine Domain was no easy feat.

On the plateau of South Stream Temple, the blue-clothed visitor had only died because the situation had changed too abruptly, with him changing from the trapper to the trapped, resulting in him being grievously unprepared.

But even in these circumstances, Bie Yanghong and Wang Po had paid a heavy price to kill him.

Madam Mu was truly powerful and Black Robe was also terrifying, but Bie Yanghong had been enlightened by his experiences in the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, causing him to advance in strength.

He was confident that he could resist them for a few moments.

He only needed a few moments or the smallest crack to send a warning to the outside.

The demi-humans might be working with the demons. This news was certain to stun the entire world.

No matter how tense was the standoff between the Great Zhou Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy, how fierce the conflict, they would have a single stance on this subject: determined suppression.

All experts would hurry over, whether it was the heads of the noble clans, the Sect Master of the Mount Li Sword Sect, or Wang Po.

Even the venerable Daoist master Shang Xingzhou might personally take action.

Chapter 937 – The Sight of a World Extinguished

Madam Mu was well aware of what Bie Yanghong was thinking and said, "None of you will have the chance."

Bie Yanghong said no more. With a shake of his right arm, his sleeve flew through the air.

Innumerable waves of Qi rumbled like thunder towards Madam Mu.

It was very difficult to notice that as he moved, a little arrow made of green jade shot out in the opposite direction, silently flying towards the Red River.

If this jade arrow was allowed to break through the clouds and flee with the winds, it would end up eighty thousand li away, notifying the human experts in the capital and in the south.

A strand of his soul was attached to the arrow. Words were not required, since this wisp of his soul contained the information.

But the moment this jade arrow touched the light peeking through the clouds, the sky suddenly dimmed as if night had come early.

Black Robe waved, transforming into a darkness that blocked the jade arrow while also concealing the surrounding area from the eyes of heaven.

Wuqiong Bi howled, her horsetail whisk spinning thousands upon thousands of eddies in the air, shrouding her surroundings in the Qi of silent extinction and transforming it into a massive sea of lotuses.

Deep with the lotus sea, a flower bloomed. Swaying in the wind, floating on the water, it slowly drifted. In reality, however, it was swiftly making its way to the horizon.

With an indifferent expression, Madam Mu waved her two sleeves, commanding the winds from high in the sky.

This wind came from the Western Sea, its moisture penetrated with cold. Like a sharp blade, it sliced the thick sea of clouds into shreds.

Countless white clouds dropped like a flock of sheep, falling into the wet and savage forests. The Qi in the atmosphere instantly froze as if it had become extremely sticky and thick.

Wuqiong Bi groaned as she felt the lotus flower formed from her true essence rapidly slow. Although it had not been destroyed, it was now impossible for it to leave.

Bie Yanghong remained calm, not affected in the slightest.

The jade arrow had not been Bie Yanghong's actual strike, much less his strongest.

He had used the jade arrow to attract Black Robe's focus and Wuqiong Bi had used the lotus sea to take away Madam Mu's gaze, giving him the time to move.

The hands of cultivators could be used to wield swords or grasp pestles, and one could also put the fingers together and make a palm. However, the simplest posture was to clench one's hand into a fist.

Bie Yanghong's fist thundered towards Black Robe beneath the tree.

After he had experienced the Tianhai Divine Empress's fist in the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, Bie Yanghong's strongest move also became a fist.

He and Black Robe were still separated by several hundred zhang, but a gloomy path abruptly formed between them.

The nameless tree on the cliff shuddered as a fist formed from star radiance traveled through that path with unimaginable speed.

With a strength that seemed capable of cleaving mountains and dividing seas, it exploded towards Black Robe's face. Before it struck, its momentum caused Black Robe's clothes to flap in the wind.

Black Robe was slightly disturbed, causing the sunlight to descend once more. One could faintly make out Black Robe's sickly green chin and those two eyes, glowing like cold stars.

Seeing Bie Yanghong's fist, Black Robe's eyes flashed with admiration and caution.

Whether it was in his identity as Demon Military Advisor or in some other identity, he had met many truly legendary experts, and he himself was one such expert.

Bie Yanghong's fist still managed to threaten him, and he knew that he had to treat it seriously.

A metal plate, so gloomy that it seemed completely devoid of light, appeared in front of him.

Boom!

Bie Yanghong's fist crashed against the metal plate.

The metal plate had already been heavily damaged, and now that it suffered another full-force blow from a Divine Domain expert, it cracked as it bent.

Black Robe's body swayed and then he retreated two steps.

With a puff, the small tree behind him shattered, its shards swept away by the wind.

A cliff thirty-some li behind him, on the opposite shore of the Red River, was suddenly implanted with several dozen deep fissures.

Rocks tumbled down as the cliff split in two and rumbled into the river, stirring astonishing waves.

The true might of a Divine Domain expert at full power could

truly split mountains and block rivers!

And yet Bie Yanghong grew even more vigilant.

There had always been many speculations regarding the enigmatic Demon Military Advisor Black Robe.

As an expert of the Human race, he was no exception.

Everyone knew that Black Robe was assuredly an expert that could rank amongst the legends, but no one knew just how strong he was.

Whether during the generation of Emperor Taizong and Wang Zhice or the current generation, only Su Li had ever exchanged blows with Black Robe.

In addition, Su Li had been prioritizing escape back then, so he had been unable to accurately assess Black Robe's strength in that battle.

It was only today, when Bie Yanghong launched his punch, that he had some measure.

Bie Yanghong was not a proud person, but he was keenly aware of his battle prowess amongst humanity's experts, and this punch of his had used ninety percent of his strength.

Black Robe had easily received it.

The metal plate was most likely some divine artifact, but even so, Black Robe's strength was still somewhat unfathomable.

But this did not matter.

Because even this punch was not Bie Yanghong's strongest move, nor his true move.

He clearly understood that the priority in today's battle was not whether he and his wife could win, but whether or not they could inform the experts of the Human race.

The jade arrow, the lotus sea, and this punch were all

smokescreens.

The instant he punched, the string on his pinkie finger had already silently snapped.

The little red flower had already reached the sky.

Neither Black Robe nor Madam Mu would be able to stop it from leaving.

The red flower rocketed through the sky, drawing a thin red line in the azure heavens.

A white cloud was calmly floating in the sky.

If someone had been observing this cloud from the very beginning, they would have realized that whether it was when Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi broke through the clouds, Black Robe revealed himself, or the winds of the Western Sea wreaked havoc, the shape of this white cloud had never changed. It had not even trembled.

Since this cloud was so sturdy, it should have been somewhat darker, but in the clear blue skies, it remained so purely white that it seemed unreal.

The red flower flew into the cloud and then vanished.

It had not flown out of the white cloud and vanished into the blue yonder. It had just disappeared.

Bie Yanghong had not noticed this white cloud at the start. Only now did he abruptly sense something and raise his head.

The cliff was silent.

Not he, Wuqiong Bi, Madam Mu, or Black Robe made another move.

The white cloud began to drift and then gradually break apart.

A gap appeared in the center of the cloud. From the ground, it looked like an eye.

This eye looked down upon all the creatures of this continent.

A ray of light shot out of this gap.

It was a golden ray of light, containing an unimaginable radiance, a most holy and divine light.

But this light was also incredibly somber, apparently wanting to crush all things, destroy all things.

Bie Yanghong vaguely knew the answer. In deep shock, he muttered, "Are none of you afraid of extinguishing the world?"

Chapter 938 – The Angel from the Other Continent

Bie Yanghong's words were naturally for Madam Mu and Black Robe to hear.

Madam Mu stood with her hands held behind her. She appeared to be overlooking a vast sea, her expression incredibly solemn. She did not reply to his question.

The tree by the edge of the cliff had already been annihilated by the fist intent, but the place where Black Robe stood still had the tree's shadow.

The mottled shadow fell on his body, concealing his appearance, but unable to drown out his voice.

A bizarre laughter came from out of the black robe and then rumbled in all directions in a thunderous and deafening boom.

Bie Yanghong's expression gradually became calm, but his mood had sunk.

He had come today to avenge his son, but now it seemed like he might die here.

With a clang, his sleeve rose, with an illusory sword formed of the purest star radiance in his hand. It slashed at the white cloud several thousand zhang away.

There was a grinding sound, like a weighty mountain sliding across the ground. The white cloud swayed for a few moments and the little red flower, seeing a chance, transformed into a red streak of light. It returned to the mountain, floating over Bie Yanghong's head in a state of absolute vigilance.

The white cloud dispersed and golden light filled the world, bright and blinding.

If Black Robe had not laid down a seal beforehand, this light

would probably have alarmed the entire continent.

At present, only a very small number of people on the two shores of the Red River could see this light.

But because it was too bright, they simply could not see what was happening inside.

Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi could see, and their expressions became abnormally grave.

One could even see in Wuqiong Bi's eyes a confusion and fear of the unknown.

Two figures gradually appeared in the boundless light.

White wings, several dozen zhang in length, slowly flapped behind them.

These two figures were naked. The curves of their bodies were perfect and they were spotlessly pure. There was nothing extra to be seen on their bodies and it was impossible to put a gender on them.

Their bodies and wings released countless rays of light. They seemed absolutely divine but also brimmed with a destructive will.

Just what were these two people? Where had they come from?

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"The Angels of the Sacred Light have already arrived. Do the two of you still plan on resisting?"

Black Robe's voice was abnormally dark and cold, but compared to the past thousand years, there was a new and indescribable emotion mixed in.

The sight of these two beings that he had termed 'Angels of the Sacred Light' had affected his mood somewhat.

The legends had become truth and had even appeared before his

eyes. Bie Yanghong truly was very shocked.

But he was still one of the strongest experts on the continent, so he very quickly regained his composure.

And when his gaze pierced through the light and swept over the two Angels, he became indifferent.

"Just with these two monsters that are neither male nor female?"

It was hard to tell whether those two so-called 'Angels of the Sacred Light' had understood his words.

The battle began immediately after.

Two streams of light ignored the several thousand zhang between them and the mountain, seemingly piercing through space to reach Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi.

Infinite light accompanied them, along with a terrifying pressure and divine attacks imbued with the aura of destruction.

In this bright and blinding light, Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi for the first time got a close-up view of the two Angels' faces, even though it was only for an instant.

The two Angels had perfect faces and their expressions were ones of absolute apathy. There was nothing human about their emotions, only divine.

In the center of their eyebrows was an arc of light, gorgeous and holy beyond compare.

Through human eyes, these two Angels appeared very similar. It was only in terms of Qi that they were different. One was extremely callous while the other was extremely ruthless, but both were lacking any human characteristics. They were more like some lifeless substance, like fierce ocean waves or frigid ice and snow.

A sword glow tore through the waves of light at the callous Angel, but it was caught by its two wings.

Bie Yanghong felt a strength as majestic as the starry sky come

through the sword glow.

The illusory sword formed from star radiance instantly shattered.

The little red flower whistled upwards, its petals bursting open, blocking off the shards of star radiance and the waves of light.

Boom!

Countless cracks appeared on the mountain, bits of gravel flying every which way while a hole several zhang deep appeared.

Bie Yanghong stood in the bottom of this hole, his hands raised up.

The Angel apathetically floated in the air, one of its hands pressing down.

The situation on the other side was even more dangerous.

Seeing the Angel descend from the heavens, Wuqiong Bi recalled the legend she had read about as a child in the Ten Thousand Years Pavilion. She began to feel fear and unease, her mind shocked and trembling. She found it difficult to maintain her Dao heart, causing her lotus sea to drift uneasily and a gap to appear in her defense. The Angel transformed into a streak of light and plunged through this gap, a needle of light slashing down like a sword!

With a squelch, Wuqiong Bi's left arm was cut off, streaming with dazzling golden blood as it flew into the sky!

Hearing his wife scream, Bie Yanghong roared in fury. He pushed out his palms, jolting away the Angel with star radiance and true essence accumulated over centuries of cultivation. He rushed as quickly as possible to stand in front of Wuqiong Bi, his right hand once more forming a sword of star radiance to push the other Angel back.

The red flower flew back and entered a swift orbit around Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi. Just like a shooting star, it exuded a

formidable Qi, temporarily putting the situation at a standstill.

In just one exchange, Bie Yanghong knew that these two Angels from the Sacred Light Continent were monstrously terrifying.

These Angels seemed instinctively able to understand and utilize the laws upon which this world operated. If one placed them in the cultivation system of this continent, they would innately be experts of the Divine Domain. Moreover, their bodies seemed to be formed of the purest Sacred Light, incredibly sturdy and practically indestructible. Not even the Imperial clan of the Demon race could compare to them. Most terrifying of all was that they possessed unimaginable speed and reaction time. It was like they were actual rays of light, defying all principles to advance or retreat as they pleased.

When confronting such new and powerful foes, even Bie Yanghong, who was ranked high amongst the experts of the Divine Domain, found it very taxing. As for Wuqiong Bi, she was not even able to take a single blow. If not for Bie Yanghong's reaction time and divine speed, she might already be dead.

Wuqiong Bi knew that the situation was extremely dangerous, so she stubbornly gritted her teeth, not making a single noise. This was despite the fact that a vicious pain was coming from the stump of her arm and the divine might of the attack was still wreaking havoc within, preventing her from using star radiance to repair her body. However, she could not stop her face from being as pale as snow or her eyes from showing fear.

Bie Yanghong saw his wife's miserable state, his eyes chilling and his rage flourishing.

The two Angels floated in the air, expressionlessly looking down at Wuqiong Bi and Bie Yanghong.

The callous Angel's gaze rested on Wuqiong Bi's severed arm. Seeing the golden blood dripping from it, the Angel suddenly spoke.

It spoke with an apathetic expression, but its voice was dignified to the extreme.

It used the language of the Sacred Light Continent, the syllables archaic and complex.

Logically speaking, no one on the cliff should have been able to understand what it was saying.

Yet, mystically, once its words were blown about by the chilly wind of the mountains, they became the language of the continent.

"It truly is the stealers of fire. You have blasphemed against God and must die."

Chapter 939 – The First Chapter of the Battle Between the Divine

Bie Yanghong could understand what the Angel was saying, but not what it meant.

He did not know what a stealer of fire was or what sort of 'God' these experts from the other continent believed in.

He knew that he was facing the most dangerous situation in his entire life, even more dangerous than his confrontation with the Tianhai Divine Empress in the Mausoleum of Books.

The Angel could have the chilly wind blowing between the mountains translate his words into the language of the Sacred Light Continent, proving that his conjecture was correct.

These monsters from the Sacred Light Continent had an innate ability to understand and use the laws and principles of the world.

It was even possible that their existences were the very basis of these laws and principles.

But at this moment, Bie Yanghong was extremely calm, his expression turning even more indifferent.

As an expert of the continent, he naturally could not panic when confronting a truly major event. On the contrary, he needed to be even more calm.

After their first exchange, he had already gained a grasp of the methods by which these Angels fought and used the laws of the world.

If he were alone, he was confident that he would at least not lose.

The problem was that his wife was heavily injured, her arm severed. Moreover, the unfathomable experts that were Madam Mu and Black Robe had been standing on the side this entire time.

The ruthless Angel suddenly descended, the sword of light in his hand slashing at Bie Yanghong.

Although it had only been awakened for a short while, its battle knowledge had been perfectly preserved, and it felt that this human expert was a threat to it.

So it had decided to get rid of this person first.

Bie Yanghong's sleeve fluttered as he struck out with his sword, seeming extremely graceful as the hand wielding the illusory sword silently exploded out of his sleeve!

A fist appeared in the air, shattering the Angel's sword of light.

Simultaneously, the little red flower that had been orbiting at high speeds suddenly left Bie Yanghong's side and assaulted the other Angel's face.

The red flower suddenly burst into countless razor-sharp petals.

The air howled and light exploded.

And then it all faded.

When the world exploded with light again, it was in the sky tensome li away.

The faces of the two Angels had several extremely fine wounds from which golden blood, packed with divine energy, dripped down like dew.

They gazed at the sword-wielding Bie Yanghong, their eyes bereft of emotion. There was no anger, no wariness, only apathy.

The more it was like this, the more terrifying it was.

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The skies boomed with thunder and raged with waves of Qi. The last remnants of the white cloud were finally torn to shreds.

After a while, countless streams of light descended from the

heavens, ultimately transforming into visible streaks of fire, like a meteorite shower.

The people of White Emperor City gasped in surprise and ran about in disorder. A few of the more cowardly ones even believed this to be heavenly punishment and kowtowed to the sky.

A few great tribes and wealthy clans activated their arrays at the earliest moment, preparing to endure the streaks of fire and their seemingly boundless heat. Meanwhile the guards in the palace, the soldiers in White Emperor City, and the great number of experts under control of the Council of Elders were already prepared to quickly put out the flames.

But reality was not as frightening as imagined. The streaks of fire vanished before they hit the ground, and the remnants of Celestial Fire only caused the temperature in White Emperor City to suddenly rise as if summer had burst onto the scene. A scant few of the streaks of fire fell in the Red River.

The air over all of White Emperor City was sealed and locked down at this time, letting not a single sound or ray of light seep out. Those experts of the continent that could understand what those streaks of light were could not see them, and those demi-human commoners and ministers who could see them had no idea what they were.

It was blood that was falling from the sky.

Every streak of light was a drop of blood.

This blood came from both the experts of the other continent and an expert of this continent.

All of them were supreme existences of the Divine Domain and their blood was also suffused with divine energy. It glowed with a holy and golden aura and was hotter than lava.

When those few drops of divine blood fell into the Red River, the massive monsters silently swam to even deeper depths. The less

intelligent monsters were utterly incapable of resisting their instinct, swimming for all they were worth to the blood to fiercely struggle and attempt to eat it.

The monsters that finally succeeded in consuming those drops of blood were soon devoured by even more vicious monsters, a process that continued to cruelly and monotonously repeat itself many times.

It was only late in the night that the ownership of these few drops of divine blood was finally decided. They were all snatched away by a fire serpent that came from the depths of the Celestial Tree.

But this fire serpent was not at all lucky. It had only the strength of a Star Condensation expert, so it simply could not hold the divine energies contained in that sacred blood.

The fire serpent struggled in the turbulent and dangerous bottom of the river for the entire night and ultimately burned to death. On that night, the Red River was so bright that it seemed ablaze.

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Many demi-human commoners noticed the phenomena in the Red River that night. They kneeled on its banks and incessantly prayed, imploring the White Emperor to come out of seclusion early, begging for God to descend and bestow its favor, and praying that the nine Celestial Trees hidden in the mists could help the demi-humans block all disasters.

Although those streaks of light did not strike the ground or scourge the land with Celestial Fire, White Emperor City was still in absolute chaos. The waves of Qi from high up in the sky were still damaging many buildings. The zoos and pastures near the easternmost Celestial Tree had their fences pushed over, allowing countless packs of beasts to escape.

In order to maintain order and stabilize the situation as quickly as possible, martial law was instituted in White Emperor City. Nobody cared about the commoners prostrating on the banks of the Red River, but the streets of the majority of districts in the city had already been cleared with soldiers patrolling. The areas near the forbidden grounds that were the Imperial Palace and Whitestone Mountain were even guarded by the elite troops, the Red River Beast Guard.

The outer city's riverside district was under somewhat lighter supervision, but it was much more deserted than usual. No one dared to leave their houses, and if they did, they would prostrate to the burning Red River. They were certainly in no mood to get drunk, so the small taverns did extremely poor business and closed early.

Xuanyuan Po left the small tavern and headed to the shore. He gazed at the light and flames rising from the depths of the river, sensing the divine Qi contained within. He subconsciously gazed up at the sky and thought to himself, just what happened during the day? Could it really be that experts of the Divine Domain were fighting?

From Star Seizer Academy to the Orthodox Academy, from the capital back to White Emperor City, this bear youth had always cultivated with extreme diligence. Other people thought that his arm was crippled, but he was still extremely confident in himself, just like the other fellows of the Orthodox Academy. However, he was well aware of his own level and knew that the Divine Domain was still unimaginably far away. No matter how long he looked, he would not be able to discover anything in those divine flames within the river. Thus, he quickly left the riverbank and returned to his home.

His home was also in the riverside district, in a place called the Pine Paths. Many of White Emperor City's poor lived here and the vast majority of buildings were built using the most common and

inexpensive pine wood. They barely managed to keep out the heat and cold, and the drainage was poor, so awful stench was a common occurrence.

Xuanyuan Po seemed unaware of all this as he silently walked along the sloping paths. Whether by the cursing from the houses, the distant stamping of heavy cavalry, or the flying carriages streaking through the air, he remained completely unaffected.

Chapter 940 – The Iron Sword Is Still Here, the Face Has Never Changed

After turning right at a little alley called Three Harmonies Borough and walking to the end, Xuanyuan Po pushed open the old wooden gate and reached the small courtyard that he had lived in for the last few years.

This courtyard was extremely small, each side about one zhang in length. However, it was extremely clean, the ground paved with white stones. Planted in the middle of the white stones was a young pine tree that was still shorter than a man. Its contrast against the gray walls and black eaves gave it a serene beauty.

In the small courtyard's vicinity was the temple to the Celestial Tree for the Pine Paths district, so the area was very quiet and secluded. Other than when the bell rang to signal the morning or twilight, there was no other noise.

One could even say that this small courtyard was the best building in all of the Pine Paths, though few people knew of it.

Xuanyuan Po walked across the white stones and sat down at the wooden floor in front of the entrance to the building. He took off his shoes and put on a clean pair of white socks.

Before entering, he glanced at the pile of firewood by the door.

It wasn't a very tall pile of firewood, but it was a very neat one. Upon careful examination, one would discover that each piece was almost identical in both length and thickness.

Xuanyuan Po quietly thought for a while, then thrust his hand into the pile of wood and slowly drew out an iron rod.

There were no edges or corners to this iron rod, much less any sharpness. It looked very ordinary and unremarkable.

In truth, it was a sword.

Regardless of which quality was used to rank it, this sword would assuredly be ranked in the top ten of the Tier of Legendary Weapons.

Who could have expected that the legendary Mountain Sea Sword was in a courtyard within the impoverished district of White Emperor City, and that it had been casually hidden in a pile of firewood by its owner?

However, it had received a similar treatment in the Orthodox Academy. It had even had to endure the oil and smoke of the kitchen and borne the duty of stoking the fires.

Xuanyuan Po carried this iron sword as he pushed open the door and entered the room.

The room was also very small, with a short table and a few mats serving as furniture. A paper door ran through the middle, separating this area from his living space.

Xuanyuan Po gazed at the paper door, tightening the grip of his left hand on the sword. His breathing became slow and steady as his expression turned extremely stern.

The paper door was very thin. Let alone the Mountain Sea Sword, even a huff from his strong and sturdy body would be enough to blow it over.

Just what was he wary of? He even seemed somewhat fearful.

Suddenly, a voice came from the other side of the paper door.

"I do not know who you are, but since you were able to notice our presence the moment you entered this small courtyard, you are presumably also a cultivator of the Dao. Please enter so that we can talk."

Xuanyuan Po did not appear shocked as he sternly asked, "Who are you?"

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On the other side of the paper door.

The room was somewhat dim. A streak of light from a flying carriage in the sky would occasionally illuminate it for a few moments.

A little blood was on the walls, slightly glimmering with gold, but it had already ceased to give off any Qi.

A Daoist nun sat against the wall. She had a delicate appearance and it was difficult to tell her age. She had a ruthless aura about her, but her eyes were full of fear.

A scholar sat beside her, his complexion slightly pale and his expression as calm as usual.

It was Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi. If not for the fact that Madam Mu was busy maintaining the seal on the sky over White Emperor City and Black Robe was concealing their activity from the heavens, this husband and wife would have found it very difficult to escape with their lives. Even so, they had still suffered terrible wounds from the two Angels and had paid an enormous price.

Wuqiong Bi was shocked and angered at Bie Yanghong's words. "Instead of just killing him, you've decided to invite him inside? For what!"

"He's the owner of this place, and when has it ever been right for the guest to keep the owner out of the house?"

Bie Yanghong looked at the figure in front of the paper door and calmly said, "We cannot move, so cannot come out to welcome you. Please, come in."

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Xuanyuan Po silently thought for a while after hearing this

conversation. Then, he took up the metal sword and pushed open the paper door.

He first saw a pile of crystals, two small pagodas, and several pieces of spirit wood.

This was clearly some sort of array that was able to ensure that not a single strand of Qi within the array could leak out and be discovered.

He then raised his head to look at the two people sitting against the wall.

It wasn't that the bear child of the Orthodox Academy had grown more careful with age. It was just that too many things had taken place in White Emperor City today. The Red River Beast Guard were still sweeping the city and the flying carriages were still in the night sky, so he had to be a little more careful.

When he saw that pale and wary Daoist nun, Xuanyuan Po froze.

And when he saw her severed arm and blood-drenched body, he couldn't help but think dazedly, is this the cycle of the Heavenly Dao?

On a certain night, this Daoist nun had visited the capital and tortured a stray dog to death. Guan Bai attempted to obstruct her, for which she severed one of his arms.

Afterward, the Daoist nun broke through the Orthodox Academy's wall, intending to kill Xuanyuan Po to vent her rage.

If not for Su Li's letter, he would have died that night and the Orthodox Academy would have been destroyed.

In his eyes, this Daoist nun was a true fiend, powerful and callous.

Who could have expected that after several years, they would meet again, and this Daoist nun would be heavily injured, with one of her arms cut off...

Xuanyuan Po said nothing, shifting his gaze to the scholarly man.

There were no wounds on his body, not even a speck of dust, and his expression was very calm.

But Xuanyuan Po sensed an aura of death.

It was obvious that this person had suffered even more severe wounds in an even deeper part of his body.

When he thought of this, Xuanyuan Po suddenly felt sad.

Since the Daoist nun was Wuqiong Bi, this man was naturally Bie Yanghong.

Just who in the world could wound Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi so?

In one of their idle chats in the Orthodox Academy, he had discussed this question with Tang Thirty-Six and the others.

The only people that could defeat this husband and wife of the Divine Domain were the two Saints that were husband and wife: the White Emperor and the Empress.

The problem was that the White Emperor was in seclusion, so who had assisted the Empress?

As Xuanyuan Po thought of these things, Bie Yanghong's gaze fell on the iron sword.

The Mountain Sea Sword had slept in the Garden of Zhou's Sword Pool for many years, after which it was hidden away in the Orthodox Academy. Bie Yanghong had also never seen its true appearance before. However, he could clearly perceive the extraordinary strength in this sword, so what of the owner of this sword?

They could only be a demi-human expert.

Bie Yanghong internally sighed as he thought, if this is my fate, there's nothing I can do.

But Xuanyuan Po did not do anything, did not attack or call for the guards.

He silently thought, then said, "What medicines do you need?"

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Bie Yanghong was startled at these words.

On the other hand, Wuqiong Bi resentfully said, "What do you plan on doing? Don't think about harming us!"

It was clear that she had already recognized Xuanyuan Po.

When she and Bie Yanghong had escaped the cliff, she was already heavily injured. Now, let alone fighting, she couldn't even stand straight.

Both shores of the Red River had been locked down and it was impossible for them to hide their tracks, so they took the risk of entering White Emperor City, hoping to use the chaos to gain a chance of survival.

White Emperor City had truly been plunged into chaos, but many demi-human experts began to appear, clearly pursuing them.

They fled across the city, coming to the relatively unguarded riverside district in the outer city. They entered the Pine Paths, sensed a sort of spiritual aura in one of the alleys there, and followed it to this small courtyard. They sneaked in, but before they had a chance to find the source of the spiritual aura, they sensed that their injuries were about to break out and so hurriedly set up this array.

And then, Xuanyuan Po returned.

Chapter 941 – Meeting

Wuqiong Bi had never imagined that she would meet Xuanyuan Po in White Emperor City.

Although it had been several years since Xuanyuan Po had left the capital, in her view, he had assuredly not forgotten the hatred from that year, just like her.

Thus, his words and actions, while seemingly without malice, undoubtedly concealed some extremely evil motive, just like how she usually conducted herself.

Xuanyuan Po said nothing.

Wuqiong Bi spoke these words with deep loathing, as if she wanted to bite him, but her eyes showed a deep fear.

It was plain to see that she was very afraid, afraid that Xuanyuan Po would kill her or notify the demi-human experts of White Emperor City.

Xuanyuan Po did not feel any pleasure at this, only disgust and pity.

He said to Bie Yanghong, "The Deer tribe has a medicine storehouse nearby. I know the steward, so I should be able to get some medicine."

Bie Yanghong replied, "If so, I will have to trouble Little Brother."

Wuqiong Bi harshly said, "I don't trust you."

Xuanyuan Po ignored her. He took the list of medicine that Bie Yanghong had written and left the room.

After she heard the gate of the courtyard close, Wuqiong Bi's expression shifted. Nervous and angry, she rebuked Bie Yanghong, "This bear cub has an old grudge with me. You let him leave and now he will assuredly notify the Demi-human Court! You don't even know him, so why do you trust him over me?"

Bie Yanghong calmly replied, "Although I don't recognize him, I know that he is a student of the Orthodox Academy."

Wuqiong Bi appeared slightly startled at these words. She said no more, and only her trembling right hand revealed her nervous mood.

After some time, Xuanyuan Po returned to the courtyard in Three Harmonies Borough. He was holding a heavy bag, apparently stuffed with many items.

Bie Yanghong gave his sincere thanks. Xuanyuan Po shook his head and opened the bag, taking out the medicines within.

Suddenly, a wind stirred within the quiet room as a horsetail whisk raised up countless threads and attacked Xuanyuan Po.

Xuanyuan Po was caught completely unawares and was in no position to respond. Fortunately, the Mountain Sea Sword promptly flew through the air and in front of his head, blocking the horsetail whisk.

There was a dull thump as the courtyard shook. The dust in the seams of the floorboards was jolted out and drifted in the air.

If not for the array of spirit wood and pagodas, the ruckus would have been even larger.

One knee on the ground, Xuanyuan Po gripped the iron sword as he attempted to resist. He felt like a mountain was pressing down on him, his strength rapidly exhausted as his breathing grew heavier.

He raised his head and saw Wuqiong Bi's ravenous eyes. Furious and confused, he shouted, "You've gone crazy!"

Wuqiong Bi shrieked, "I wanted to kill you back then, and I certainly have no plans of receiving your kindness tonight, as that will be my humiliation. Thus, you must die. Moreover, it is only the dead who can't reveal secrets!"

He had grown up in the remote mountains and forests around his tribe and when in the capital, he had studied and lived in the simple places that were Star Seizer Academy and the Orthodox Academy. As a result, Xuanyuan Po simply could not follow Wuqiong Bi's logic, his angry reply being, "How can your wife be so malicious!"

Malicious or crazy, Wuqiong Bi was still an expert of the Divine Domain. Although missing an arm and heavily injured, she was still many times stronger than Xuanyuan Po.

The sword gradually sank down as Xuanyuan Po was about to reach his limit. Suddenly, a smear of color appeared in the room.

This smear of color was bright red, moist and incomparably fresh. It was the little red flower.

Wuqiong Bi's face was immediately filled with shock and fear when she saw this flower. Like a bolt of lightning, she drew back the horsetail whisk to protect herself.

There were several light pops as Bie Yanghong's fingers moved like the wind, sealing off Wuqiong Bi's meridians.

Enraged, Wuqiong Bi forcefully moved her true essence to break these restrictions and counterattack.

Bie Yanghong drew back his fingers, doing nothing as he gazed at the approaching horsetail whisk.

In her surprise, Wuqiong Bi's movements slowed.

A mouthful of true blood shot out of Bie Yanghong's mouth and his complexion instantly paled.

The red flower flew back to his side. As it quietly floated, beads of dew gradually appeared on its heavily damaged petals. It seemed to be crying.

After leaving the cliff, Bie Yanghong had needed several hours to finally gather a little true essence, which now dispersed with this

mouthful of true blood.

Seeing this sight, Wuqiong Bi finally understood something. Gasping in surprise, she ran over and embraced him as she wept.

"You've gone crazy! Just for this bear cub!"

Xuanyuan Po had a very perplexed expression.

He had no idea what just happened.

He had clearly wanted to help these two out of kindness, so why had Wuqiong Bi wanted to kill him, and why had Bie Yanghong protected him? Why had Wuqiong Bi earlier seemed so angry that it felt like she wanted Bie Yanghong to die but was now so anguished upon seeing Bie Yanghong vomit blood, as if she wanted to die in his place?

Were this powerful husband and wife both crazy?

Xuanyuan Po silently pondered all this, then said, "Right now, there are many people that want to catch you, and for the next few days, a grand event will take place in White Emperor City, with many experts coming. The two of you should just stay here and not go out. I have a few matters to take care of in the next few days. After that, we'll see what we should do."

After saying this, he put away the Mountain Sea Sword, put the medicine in the bag and some food and water on the floor, then left.

When he reached the paper door, he stopped and abruptly said, "Sir, how did a person like you marry a woman like this?"

Bie Yanghong did not answer the question.

The wooden gate of the courtyard closed again. Everything was quiet, the only sound being the wind rustling the leaves of that short pine tree.

The room was quiet for a very long time, the mood growing more and more oppressive until it eventually became very awkward.

Wuqiong Bi looked at Bie Yanghong and shakily said, "Senior Brother, have you perhaps always regretted your decision to marry me?"

Bie Yanghong faintly smiled. "Just what nonsense are you thinking about?"

"Presumably, it has not been the first time you have heard that bear cub's question."

Wuqiong Bi felt more and more angry and ashamed. "Did you think I didn't know? In front of the Mausoleum of Books, on Holy Maiden Peak, whether it was that Demon Empress Tianhai or Wang Po, weren't the gazes they aimed at us conveying exactly this meaning? The entire world believes that I don't deserve you!"

Bie Yanghong sighed. "Do we need to care about what others think of the matters between the two of us?"

Wuqiong Bi yelled, "Aren't you the same? You also think that I often humiliate you in front of the world."

Bie Yanghong calmly gazed at her, saying, "Junior Sister, I've never regretted marrying you. I only regret that I've spoiled you too much."

He spoke with deep sincerity.

Wuqiong Bi was stupefied.

It was hard to say if she had truly understood the meaning of these words.

She only knew that she needed to say something here, but she realized that she didn't know what to say.

She felt deeply anguished and began to weep. She thought to herself, how could my luck back then be so bad that I just happened to meet this person?

Chapter 942 – The Diplomatic Mission from the Great Western Continent

The demi-human experts and the elite Red River Beast Guard followed the Empress's orders and searched the city for the whereabouts of Bie Yanghong and his wife. Coupled with the phenomena from yesterday, White Emperor City was in an abnormally tense mood. The small towns in its periphery closed the gates that faced the mountains and wilderness.

The mists and clouds in the mountains were very difficult to disperse. Only when the sun was at its zenith and the wind was at its most fierce was there a chance to clearly see those nine massive trees that soared straight into the sky, and right now, many eyes were peering towards the mountains of a certain direction.

On the other side of that vast range of mountains was the Western Sea, and deep within the Western Sea was the legendary Great Western Continent.

The most recent rumor said that the Second Prince of the Great Western Continent was coming to White Emperor City to marry Princess Luoheng.

The rumors finally received proof today. The gates of those small towns that led to the mountains were all opened, the official roads quaked, and the monsters fled.

The diplomatic mission from the Great Western Continent was about to arrive at White Emperor City, its representative the Second Prince. The ostensible purpose of the diplomatic mission was to congratulate the White Emperor for his birthday. And given the relationship between the Great Western Continent and the Empress, there was simply no reason for the demi-humans to reject them. When the diplomatic mission finally reached White Emperor City, the tense atmosphere that had persisted for one day and one night was slightly eased, with many commoners from the

various demi-human tribes packing the streets to view the spectacle.

The gaze that was also watching Great Western Continent but with incomparable vigilance naturally came from the Human race.

White Emperor City had three important buildings belonging to the Human race.

These were the embassy of the Great Zhou Imperial Court, the Orthodoxy's Daoist Church of the Western Wastes, and the Tang clan's company, which represented the powers of the south.

The first reaction of the Imperial Court's ambassador and the Tang clan's manager upon learning of this matter was this: if White Emperor City was truly prepared to enter a marriage alliance with the Great Western Continent, they had assuredly made ample preparations, so nothing could be done other than to inform the Imperial Court and Wenshui as quickly as possible.

The bishops of the Daoist Church of the Western Wastes, which represented the will of the Orthodoxy, similarly knew that this matter would be very difficult to stop. But now that the entire continent knew that the Great Western Continent's Imperial clan had attempted to harm the Pope, how could they possibly stand and watch as this same clan sent someone to marry the Pope's student?

When the Great Western Continent's diplomatic mission entered the palace, the Orthodoxy's Daoist Church of the Western Wastes sent a letter of protest into the palace at the same time, its wording so unyielding that it was practically a letter of challenge. At the same time, the archbishop of the church tore apart the invitation for the dinner to welcome the diplomatic mission in front of thousands of demi-human believers and then stamped on its shreds, not even giving the demi-humans the smallest bit of face.

Upon learning and verifying this news, the Great Zhou's embassy and the Tang clan's company also refused the invitation to

tonight's banquet, though they did it in a much gentler manner.

Regardless of what the Human race's stance was, the banquet still proceeded normally.

On the same night, White Emperor City was festooned with bright lanterns and banners. The Imperial Palace at the very highest point was particularly well lit, oil strongly blazing as the entire place celebrated.

Even after the banquet concluded, the festivities did not slacken. Though the guests of honor, the members of the Great Western Continent's diplomatic mission, had already gone to rest, many of the other guests did not.

Upon seeing the figures of those guests that remained in the palace, the several hundred Red River Beast Guard in charge of keeping the Imperial Palace safe were very wary, and even rather nervous. However, they did not dare to drive the guests away or even attempt to persuade them. This was because these guests were all important personages of the Demi-human race, and some of them were even their fathers.

The important demi-human personages in these palace halls included generals and ministers, but the majority of them were members of the Council of Elders.

The Demi-human Council of Elders was somewhat similar to the Demon Council of Elders, but it was stronger and had a higher status. The Demi-human race was formed from three-hundred-some tribes, and the clan leaders of twenty-seven of these tribes, the most powerful and most storied, were naturally members of the Council of Elders. Another ten-odd seats were chosen from the remaining tribes. As for how one's rank in the Council of Elders was decided, it was very simple: the longer one lived, the stronger one was, and the higher one's seat.

At present, the Chief Elder of the Demi-human race was the leader of the Xiang clan.

It was rumored that this Chief Elder possessed a divine strength that reached the heavens. Although he had not yet entered the Divine, he already had the ability to fight with an expert of the Divine Domain.

The Chief Elder's mountainous body was incredibly conspicuous as it stood in front of the palace hall, and it seemed just as silent as a mountain.

His silence did not quiet the conversations in the hall. On the contrary, the other guests seemed to indulge, the conversations getting louder and louder, the atmosphere growing increasingly tense.

These conversations were naturally related to the Great Western Continent's diplomatic mission, and also to yesterday's phenomena, and also to the rumors that had been going around over the last few days.

Was Princess Luoluo really about to be married off? Was there a need to be in such a hurry? Were His Majesty's injuries still not better? And truly, why could it not be Princess Luoluo? Although such a thing had never happened in the entirety of the Demi-human race's history, didn't His Holiness the Pope resolve her problems?

One rumor could produce many conjectures. Both the members of the Council of Elders and the demi-human generals speculated on the veracity of the rumor as well as many more questions.

Of course, whether or not Princess Luoluo was willing to be married off and who she would be married off to had very little to do with them, because the Emperor of the Demi-humans would always be from the White Emperor clan. The only ones who had the right to care, the side branches of the White Emperor clan, were actually even more quiet and subdued, not daring to express an opinion for fear of offending the White Emperor and the Empress.

But did she really have to be married off to the Second Prince from the Great Western Continent?

Madam Mu slowly strode into the palace hall, which seemed somewhat empty due to its vast size.

The demi-human elders, generals, and ministers within the hall bowed as one.

The giant demi-human Chief Elder had a very deep and vigorous voice, like the echo coming from deep within the mountains.

But he spoke very directly, in absolute accord with the temperament of demi-humans and the manner in which they discussed topics.

"Empress, are you truly prepared to marry off Her Highness to the nephew of your parent's clan?"

The Chief Elder gazed at Madam Mu, his right hand gripping the handle of an axe, making no attempts to hide his movements.

"If so, we will revolt."

Madam Mu appeared incredibly tiny in front of him, like a dwarf, but she had an even more formidable presence.

She indifferently said to the Chief Elder, "Then revolt well."

These words of absolute indifference were the most tyrannical declaration.

She had already been Empress for centuries and shared a deep love with the White Emperor. It had been many years since she had been that young lady entering the land of demi-humans for the first time, and she had an incredibly lofty reputation amongst the Demi-human race. Whether it was the clan leaders of the tribes or the young hunters along the two shores of the Red River, they all regarded her as a god, not daring to pay her the slightest disrespect.

The palace hall became utterly silent at this declaration. No one

dared to speak, with only the wind blowing against the hard stone walls.

Even the Chief Elder felt a powerful pressure. He thought quietly for a moment, then said, "We require an explanation."

Madam Mu expressionlessly said, "Rumors are only rumors. Moreover, even if she is to be married off, why must Elder oppose it?"

The Chief Elder's expression did not change as he impassively said, "Empress should know the reason."

Chapter 943 – The Young Man from the Demon Race

Madam Mu's gaze glanced over the giant figures of the demi-human generals.

"I understand what all of you are thinking. Luoheng is my daughter by blood. If she can succeed to the throne, why should I or His Majesty be so concerned? In the end, rumors are just rumors, whether they are a few days old or a few years old. No matter how overflowing with talent His Holiness the Pope is, he was still just a teenager back then. Did you really think that he could resolve the problem that our race had not been able to solve for tens of thousands of years? It was just a trick played by the Human race."

These words were extremely reasonable and very persuasive.

The elders, generals, and ministers in the hall recalled how Princess Luoluo remained as gentle and weak as when she was little, not even reaching the fourth revolution of the divine body. She was truly different from the White Emperor in that same period, so they could only presume that the problem of her meridians had not been resolved. Thus, they could not help but ruefully sigh.

The Chief Elder was unconvinced. "I want to see His Majesty."

Madam Mu stared into his eyes and said, "You know that His Majesty is still recovering from his wounds."

The Chief Elder replied, "I know, but the succession of the Demi-human race is a major event, so His Majesty should be able to forgive me for disturbing him."

Madam Mu thought for a moment, then said, "If His Majesty is willing to see you, then you naturally may."

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After two hours, the Chief Elder returned to the palace hall. The oil candles protruding from the stone walls flickered, despite the lack of wind.

Countless gazes fell on the Chief Elder's body, wanting to know if he had met the White Emperor and what the White Emperor had said.

The Chief Elder shook his head. "I was not able to meet His Majesty."

The elders, generals, and ministers sighed in regret.

"But I could feel His Majesty's will, so I will no longer oppose this matter."

The Chief Elder turned to Madam Mu and added, "But this matter must be carried out in accordance with the succession rules my Demi-human race has followed for countless years. Even if Her Highness must be married, it cannot be a private proposal. The groom must be chosen by the Wildfire of the Celestial Trees, obeying the will of the ancestral spirits and gods."

The hall began to murmur with discussion once more, but this had always been a part of the rumor, so no one was too shocked.

Madam Mu replied, "Your meaning is to formally hold the Heavenly Selection ceremony?"

"Correct." The Chief Elder's hand once more fell on his axe as he stated, "Or else we will still revolt."

Madam Mu stared into his eyes. "Everything is to be carried out according to the rules of the race, without a single error. Do you dare consent?"

The Chief Elder replied, "Empress has received the respect of all the subjects of our race for several centuries. I am old and only hope that everything can be as it was in the past."

After so saying, he walked out of the hall, his mountainous body casting a giant shadow on the floorboards.

The majority of the clan elders and about half of the ministers and generals bowed to Madam Mu and followed the Chief Elder out.

Madam Mu fell quiet for a few moments, then waved her sleeve, ordering those subjects loyal to her to leave as well.

The great hall fell quiet once more, she being the only person within.

The oil candles gave off light, but also a faint charred smell. Moreover, the blowing wind caused the lights to flicker uneasily.

Even after centuries, she was still not used to this. She still missed the warmth and light of the Mermaid Pearls in the Great Western Continent's Imperial Palace.

The stone walls were clearly lit. They appeared to have been grinded down until they were completely smooth, but with her eyes, she could naturally see the undulations on their surfaces.

Such crude stone—how could it have the right to enter the Imperial Palace? When she was Princess of the Great Western Continent, she would never have imagined such a thing.

Yes, she had lived in White Emperor City for many years, but there were still some things that she found impossible to get used to.

Like those matters mentioned just now, or like those conversations that had taken place just now.

In the Great Western Continent or the capital of the Human race, the Chief Elder taking such a stance would have already been met with an execution.

But this was White Emperor City. For countless years, this was how the demi-humans living here had passed their lives, their

discussions very straightforward, very savage.

Truly a bunch of uncivilized beasts.

She found it impossible to get used to, and it was also impossible for her to change all of it. She was only Empress, not White Emperor.

She stood in the center of the vast hall, quietly thinking for a very long time.

A wind came from the distant Western Sea, howling amidst the mountains.

The many fish in a sea-green lake behind the mountains died.

An indifferent smile appeared on her face. It was filled with love, like a mother seeing her child.

She had always been the mother of all demi-humans.

The shadows flickered as a young man walked in.

This young man was very handsome and tall, carrying himself with an elegant demeanor.

He was the Second Prince of the Great Western Continent.

Madam Mu pityingly said, "You came this time for nothing. I have truly troubled you."

The Second Prince smiled. "What does a little rain or wind matter for the sake of Cousin's happiness? And besides, it's been many years since I last saw the two shores of the Red River, and I rather missed them."

Madam Mu said, "After the Heavenly Selection begins, enter the Celestial Tree and comprehend the Wildfire. It will greatly assist you in your cultivation."

"It's rare for me to make a visit, so I naturally have to gain some profit, but... just who has Aunt chosen to be Cousin's husband?"

The Second Prince curiously asked, "Aunt is so sure that he will

be chosen by the ancestral spirits?"

Madam Mu replied, "I have only arranged for him to be baptised by the Wildfire in the Celestial Tree. As for whether the Demi-human race's ancestral spirits will choose him, he will have to rely on his own capabilities."

The Second Prince thought for a while, then asked, "Is it Xiaode?"

Madam Mu patted him on the arm. "Don't think about it too much. Chat with your younger aunt a little. Her mood recently has been very poor."

The Second Prince coldly laughed. "If I didn't know that Chen Changsheng won't be coming, I would definitely have to exchange a few blows with him."

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The day that the Great Western Continent's diplomatic mission arrived at White Emperor City...

Was also the second day after Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi arrived at White Emperor City...

And was also the third day after the internal discord of South Stream Temple...

And was also the day before the Heavenly Selection ceremony was to take place.

At that time, Chen Changsheng was still at Mount Li. He had still not received the letter delivered from the capital by Red Goose, nor had he obtained his master Shang Xingzhou's personal letter from the Prince of Louyang.

Neither the Imperial Court nor the Orthodoxy had received any news from White Emperor City. As for Shang Xingzhou, who knew so well the secrets of the heavens, his gaze was still aimed at the north, at Xuelao City.

No one knew that many days ago, one person left Xuelao City, reaching White Emperor City the same day as the Great Western Continent's diplomatic mission.

This young man easily passed through the inspection of the guards and took as his residence a courtyard in the eastern part of the city.

This courtyard had stood for many years. It was very ordinary, but also very large. Its floor was covered with yellow sand, giving it the appearance of a desert.

A few bloodstains could be seen on the sand. They glistened like they had been mixed with bits of gold, though they had long since ceased to give off any scent.

Deep within the sand was a tree.

This tree was not very large and its canopy was by no means lush. However, it cast a massive shadow against the ground, letting not a spot of light through. It was so gloomy that it seemed like true darkness.

The young man stood beneath the tree.

Although the shadows were thick, one could clearly see that there were no demon horns on his head, explaining how he had been able to enter the city so easily.

"This is the last foothold my Divine race has in White Emperor City? Green blood and yellow sands—it's a little interesting."

The young man held his hands behind his back as he curiously surveyed his surroundings, but it was hard to say who he was talking to.

"If the White Emperor is not truly sleeping, then this is too dangerous. Quickly leave, Military Advisor."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

The wind gently rustled the tree leaves, causing the shadows to

shake in unease. It was like a sleeve, and also like someone was speaking.

In the courtyard of yellow sand, only the young man remained, his hands held behind his back.

He raised his head up to the sky.

The winter sun shone upon his face.

His face was rather pale and unhealthy-looking.

He narrowed his eyes.

Holding one's hands behind one's back, looking up to the sky, and narrowing one's eyes... it seemed like many important people in the world liked to do such things.

Yes, the young man from Xuelao City was a truly important personage.

He was the one that Chen Changsheng had met in the snowy mountains: the young Demon Lord.

Chapter 944 – The Starry Sky Can Kill People, but Who Will Save Them?

The young Demon Lord walked on the yellow sand, following the trail of seemingly ancient golden bloodstains.

The place he walked to was the back gate of the courtyard. The lock on the gate was covered in rust, a sign of the many years since the gate was last opened. It looked very ordinary.

If one had to find something special, it would probably be the two stone sculptures flanking the steps.

The stone sculptures depicted what appeared to be two men, completely naked. The curves of their bodies were perfect and each of them had a pair of wings on its back.

The statues had no expression, yet they seemed so vivid that they could come to life at any moment.

If a few of those demi-human elders that had lived for countless years were to see these statues, perhaps they would associate them with those gods mentioned in their tribal myths.

In contrast, to the Demon Lord's eyes, these two stone sculptures were a sort of taboo which he regarded with an expression of loathing and vigilance.

In truth, he was very familiar with these two stone statues.

When he was very young, he had seen these two deep within the Demon Palace, in the stone carving that depicted all the gods. He also did not find it strange for these two statues to suddenly move from Xuelao City's Demon Palace to White Emperor City, because on that ceremony to the stars that night, he had personally witnessed two beams of light pierce through the wall and pour into these statues.

The Demon Lord's complexion paled as he pondered. Only after a

while did it return to normal.

He still was very wary about the ceremony to the stars and had many misgivings, but the circumstances had compelled him to accept Black Robe's proposal.

But when he saw with his own eyes these clearly lifeless, absolutely dead stone statues, he once more began to wonder whether his choice had been correct.

"Father, your view was probably right... The starry sky can kill people, can help us kill people, but it can also kill us."

The Demon Lord gazed at the two stone statues, the hands he held behind his back slowly stroking a stone object. He slowly said, "But Father can be at ease. I will not regard them as kindred, only as hunting dogs. If there comes a day that they understand, I will destroy this thing."

If Chen Changsheng were present, he would probably recognize the object in his hands.

On that night in the mountains, it was precisely this stone object that was stabbed into the old Demon Lord's stomach, bringing down from the starry sky that pillar of light suffused with aura of extermination.

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The palace hall that Luoluo resided in was at the highest point of White Emperor City, even higher than the residence of her parents.

This was because she loved looking into the distance from high places. Of course, this position also signified how much the White Emperor couple pampered her.

It was just that the clouds of White Emperor City were much thicker today. Standing by the window, it was hard to see very far,

and the light was rather dim. There was only the familiar Red River and the green mountains on the opposite shore, those humid and dense forests which she felt like she could smell from here, and those massive trees that loomed in the distance, seeming to be as tall as the sky.

She had already seen these sights for many years and grown accustomed to them, but for some reason, they seemed rather strange to her today.

Soon after, she heard a din from the palace and the beating of war drums, sensed the Qi of the Wildfire that was aroused by the beast dances.

Was the grand ceremony truly about to begin?

She already knew of what had happened last night.

On the surface, the Xiang clan's leader and the other elders had put on a very tough stance, but she knew that this was all faked.

In the battle between Divine Domains two days ago, it was clearly her mother that had won, her prestige and momentum now at their strongest. The Chief Elder and all the other important personages of the Demi-human race were only able to grip their axes and talk of revolt, utterly powerless to make her mother yield.

What made her even sadder was that the Chief Elder had clearly perceived her father's will.

This meant that her father also knew of this matter.

Last night, before the Chief Elder left the palace, he had come to see her. He had sworn a blood oath that he would ensure her safety, but he did not even hint at today's events.

The grand ceremony of Heavenly Selection would proceed as normal.

Just like how the rain would fall from the sky, she would be married off, and this was impossible to change.

Just who was her mother planning to marry her to? Why was she so confident that the person she chose would be chosen by the ancestral spirits and endure the baptism of the Wildfire within the tree?

Luoluo gazed at the extremely vigilant Red River Beast Guard outside the window as she contemplated these questions.

Last night, she had been so busy thinking and making arrangements for her plans that she had not slept well, giving her a rather haggard complexion.

Guardian Li looked at Luoluo's face and thought that grief had caused her insomnia. She found it impossible to suppress her pity, and her eyes moistened.

"Leave through the tunnel?"

Guardian Li placed a cup of acorn tea in front of Luoluo and whispered, "I've already obtained the key."

Luoluo lightly shook her head. "Those heavenly silkworms down there are not easy to deal with."

Guardian Li's complexion slightly paled at mention of this creature. Giving up on this plan, she began to think of other methods of escape.

Luoluo had not spoken the truth.

The heavenly silkworms were the protectors of White Emperor City's underground abyss and were incredibly powerful. Moreover, they could travel freely in the abyss and through the earth. From a certain perspective, they could put a stop to any foe that attempted to sneak in through the ground. However, three years ago, she had already tried and confirmed that the heavenly silkworms could not stop her.

She caressed the small stone tied to her neck, happily smiling as she recalled the sight of those heavenly silkworms fleeing in fright.

Guardian Li had no idea that this little stone was a legendary Heavenly Tome Monolith. She thought that Luoluo was smiling from excessive shock and panicked, not knowing what to do.

Luoluo soothed her for a while before Guardian Li finally calmed down.

Yes, even with the valiant Red River Beast Guard keeping close watch, even with White Emperor City secretly locked down, if she wanted to escape, it would not be very hard.

In Madam Mu's eyes, in the eyes of the Xiang clan leader and the other elders, in the eyes of the demi-human generals and ministers, Princess Luoheng had not been diligently cultivating the imperial techniques in the last few years, her progress was extremely slow, and she was still just as weak as she was before her visit to the capital... Nobody knew that she had always been practicing diligently. Just like her teacher, she would wake up promptly at five in the morning, closing her eyes and composing herself for five seconds. After rising from bed, she would wash up and eat breakfast, after which she would begin to study and meditate until the late night and sleep.

Yes, her rate of progress in the imperial techniques was very mediocre, even rather slow, but that was not for lack of comprehension, nor was it because the problem of her meridians had not been solved. Instead, it was because she used the vast majority of her time to finish the homework her teacher had given her. In other words, she used most of her time to study the art of the sword.

Other than the Heavenly Tome Monolith and her ever-strengthening cultivation in the sword, she still had many powerful magical artifacts her father had given her. It was a trivial task for her to frighten those heavenly silkworms and leave through the tunnels. Her sorrow was greater because after a few days, she might not be able to see those sights outside her window.

Yes, if nothing else happened, if... her teacher did not reach White Emperor City in time, then she could only leave on her own.

Suddenly, an extremely shrill sound, almost ear-piercing, came from the window, the sound of air being torn to shreds, of a seal being torn open by a high-speed collision with some object. This was followed by ten-odd thuds, dust rising from the ground, the breeze suddenly fading, and a figure appearing.

This person's still-drifting sleeve was still blurred from its swift passage through the air, through which one could imagine just how fast this person had been traveling.

This person wore a somewhat old gown patterned with images of copper coins, as well as a very indifferent expression, making him seem like some wealthy old man. If one noticed the yellow earth on his boots, they might even think of him as some big landlord who liked to personally work the fields.

Chapter 945 – There Are Records of Herding the Clouds over the Sea

"Guardian Jin, how did you get here?"

Upon seeing this person, Guardian Li was both shocked and worried.

Jin Yulu had come.

The fastest and oldest demi-human general had once followed Luoluo to the capital for her studies and had acted as a gatekeeper in the Orthodox Academy for a long period of time. Upon returning to the land of the demi-humans, he had not entered the court and become an official, but continued his life tilling the fields, until now.

Luoluo knew that Xuanyuan Po had attempted to get in touch with him, but Xuanyuan Po had failed because Jin Yulu's estate had been under constant guard. As for how he was able to leave his estate and come to the Imperial Palace today, the unconscious guards and maids outside the hall explained everything.

"Your Highness, please come with me," Jin Yulu said to Luoluo.

As the expert with the fastest movement technique and eldest of the Demi-human race's generals, there really was a chance that he could escape with Luoluo, even in the heavily guarded Imperial Palace.

Guardian Li gazed at Luoluo, intent on persuading her. "Empress will at most discipline me. She will not treat me too badly."

Luoluo stepped forward and took Jin Yulu's hand. She was extremely grateful, but she did not agree to his request, instead whispering to him a few words.

"Quickly go through the tunnel behind the hall. I have here..."

She wanted to give the magical artifacts her father had given her

to Jin Yulu and have him leave through the tunnel, but before she could finish, the clouds in the sky began to gather like a shepherd herding their flock. The sun was obscured, casting all of White Emperor City into shadow.

Madam Mu entered the stone hall and calmly said to Jin Yulu, "Even a little child knows you can't succeed, so why did you insist on coming?"

After a period of silence, Jin Yulu replied, "On what charge is Empress prepared to kill me? Trespassing in the Imperial Palace or disrespecting a Saint?"

Madam Mu replied, "Your prestige in the race is too high. Even His Majesty cannot lightly kill you, let alone me. I only do not understand why you have always had such hostility towards His Majesty for all these years and have taken aim at me many times. Have we not treated you kindly?"

Jin Yulu answered, "In matters of the past, His Majesty naturally understands. For today's matter, Empress probably understands."

Madam Mu said, "You should well know that this is not my will alone. The Chief Elder perceived His Majesty's will last night."

"This is where I and Old Xiang, along with those other elders, are different. Perhaps it's because His Majesty has never liked me very much."

Jin Yulu gazed at Madam Mu and impassively said, "Even if this is a decree from His Majesty, as long as I believe it to be incorrect, I still will not accept it."

Madam Mu said, "Guardian Jin truly lives up to his reputation. Let us put aside your crime of defying the decree for now. In terms of right and wrong, who are you to decide them?"

Jin Yulu answered, "The eight hundred li of the Red River, the hundred thousand li of the land of demi-humans—how can it be given to someone not of my race?"

Madam Mu replied, "The so-called Heavenly Selection is the will of the ancestral spirits. No matter what race the person belongs to, as long as they are accepted by the Celestial Tree and baptized by the Wildfire, their blood will be transformed into the true body of the demi-human emperors, becoming a part of the White Emperor clan. How can they be considered an outsider then?"

Jin Yulu looked into her eyes and asked, "You are speaking of your arrangements for the Second Prince?"

Madam Mu answered, "Everyone who participates in the Heavenly Selection ceremony must obey the arrangements of fate. This is the fairest method."

Jin Yulu asked, "Your sudden announcement of this matter leaves the humans no time to respond or send anyone to participate, so how can this be considered fair?"

Madam Mu indifferently said, "What does this have to do with Guardian Jin? Are you colluding with the Zhou people?"

Jin Yulu sternly said, "Does Her Highness exist in your eyes? She acknowledged His Holiness the Pope as her teacher, so she also might be colluding with the Zhou people? So that even though you clearly know that her meridians have already been repaired and that, given sufficient time, she can smoothly inherit the throne, you still insist on holding the Heavenly Selection ceremony?"

Madam Mu answered, "I understand her circumstances more than any of you. I hope that she can obtain happiness, but I will not give her the slightest misconception."

Jin Yulu asked, "A misconception or a lie? Empress, not even you can fool yourself with these words, so how can you convince Her Highness?"

As they spoke, they did not avoid Luoluo. She had heard everything.

With these final words, the stone hall fell abnormally silent.

After speaking up to here, they had run out of things to discuss.

Madam Mu lightly waved her sleeve, her jade-white hand turning. A gust of wind stirred to life in the hall and a massive hand condensed from clear light swatted at Jin Yulu.

Countless ear-piercing howls resounded through the hall and the air grew turbulent.

Jin Yulu blurred, avoiding the giant hand and retreating onto a stone platform.

Madam Mu took a step forward, her expression unchanging as her sleeve rose again.

The clouds gathered over White Emperor City suddenly dropped several li, so low that they almost touched the mountains on the opposite shore.

Someone with good eyesight might have even been able to see the raindrops condensing in the clouds.

As the layer of clouds moved down, so did an unimaginable pressure. It enveloped White Emperor City, especially the stone hall at the very top.

A groan came from the platform and the blur of Jin Yulu's body that seemed about to meld into the world slightly slowed.

His strength was formidable, but if he wanted to contend against an expert of the Divine Domain, he had to push his speed to the limit to have a chance.

But Madam Mu just waved her sleeve, borrowing the might of the world and the pressure of the clouds to break his movement technique.

The clouds in the sky continued to get closer and closer to the ground, the massive trees on the opposite shore practically disappearing from sight. The pressure falling on the stone hall continued to increase. The unconscious guards and maids began to

moan in pain while Guardian Li began to find it incredibly difficult to breathe.

Jin Yulu's body was becoming increasingly distinct.

The more distinct his blurred figure, the slower his speed.

The moment his figure completely appeared, Jin Yulu would receive Madam Mu's thunderous blow.

This sight did not become reality.

Because Luoluo walked to Madam Mu's side.

She grabbed Madam Mu's sleeve, raised her small face, and opened her eyes wide as she very seriously spoke.

"Mother, please don't do this."

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Before the black clouds could crush the city, before a drop of rain could fall, they returned back to the sky, where they gradually dispersed.

Jin Yulu fled the Imperial Palace. Presumably, it would be impossible for him to return to the fields he had worked for so many years, so it was hard to say where he would go.

Guardian Li and the guards and maids exited. The stone hall was quiet, with only Madam Mu and Luoluo inside.

"Many people think that I am only doing this out of my selfish desires."

Madam Mu looked into Luoluo's eyes and asked, "Do you think the same?"

Luoluo silently thought for a very long time. She did not directly answer the question, instead asking a rather strange question.

"Mother... after so many years, are you still thinking about home?"

Chapter 946 – It's Precisely Because of So Many Affections That One Deceives Oneself

Anyone would think of their home. Even when she was in the Orthodox Academy, living the happiest period of her life, Luoluo would still often think of him, think of her father, think of her mother, think of those big fellows in the Red River and the birds on the Celestial Trees.

She naturally wouldn't consider this wrong, but...

"Very good. At the very least, you are willing to believe that I did not do these things out of my selfish desires, even though you now believe that I am doing this for the Great Western Continent."

Madam Mu calmly said to her, "I will not deny that the Great Western Continent is my homeland, but both your maternal grandfather and grandmother have already taken their leave of this mortal coil, so do you really think that I would still value the Great Western Continent over White Emperor City? The rumors are false; how could I marry you off to your cousin?"

Luoluo was stunned by these words.

Although she did not have much real power to speak of, she was still the sole Princess of the Demi-humans. She had an extremely high status within White Emperor City, and the members of the Council of Elders, including the Xiang clan elder, had always doted upon her. Even if she didn't make any efforts to inquire, many matters would still be impossible to hide from her.

For instance, in the matter of this marriage, she had been able to easily find out that the source of this rumor was a guard of the Abyssal Pearl Pavilion, and this guard was one of Madam Mu's most loyal subordinates. It was precisely for this reason that she had never doubted the veracity of the rumor... Mother is not planning on marrying me off to Cousin? Then what did the Great

Western Continent's diplomatic mission come here for? Why did Chief Elder send someone this morning to notify me that Second Cousin's name has already been registered for participation in the Heavenly Selection ceremony?

"This matter is the will of both me and your father. For the sake of safety, we have spoken of it to no one, including you."

Madam Mu continued, "In a little while, the Heavenly Selection ceremony will begin. I think that will also be the time to tell you."

Luoluo asked, "Mother, just what is it?"

Madam Mu rubbed her head and said, "Of course, it's still your marriage."

Luoluo was very nervous, inexplicably feeling somewhat anxious.

"Guardian Jin's words were not wrong, and nor were the Chief Elder's. You yourself know more than anyone else... His Holiness the Pope truly did repair your meridians. As long as you are given enough time, you will definitely be able to cultivate the techniques of the White Emperor clan to their peak, becoming the next White Emperor."

Madam Mu's expression turned grave as she added, "But I and your father are worried that there is not enough time."

Luoluo replied, "I don't understand Mother's meaning."

Madam Mu said, "You are the sole Princess of the Demi-humans, so you should do some things for this place."

Luoluo understood and fell silent.

Ever since she was little, she knew that she had a duty to bear.

Chen Changsheng was also well aware of this point, so he had never requested her to do anything.

If the Demi-human race was in a bad state, she would need to make a contribution, and there was not much time for her to mature into the new White Emperor.

Then she would have to be like the princesses over the countless years, seeking gains for the Demi-human race through marriage.

This was her marriage: a marriage alliance.

Her mother had done the same.

"Marry to Xuelao City," Madam Mu said, staring into Luoluo's eyes.

All riddles were answered here.

Luoluo's complexion instantly paled as she whispered, "Why?"

Madam Mu explained, "This generation's Demon Lord is truly an extraordinary individual. Only he is a suitable match for you."

Luoluo replied, "Mother, you know that this is not my question."

This was not a simple marriage, not about the love of a man and woman, and not a question of a partner of equal social status.

"Why? It's naturally for the future of the Demi-human race."

Madam Mu looked into her eyes. "At the moment, the Human race's luck is at its most flourishing. Originally, it was believed that after the coup of the Mausoleum of Books and the consecutive deaths amongst the Storms of the Eight Directions, the Human race would settle down for a while. Who could have expected that in a few short years, Wang Po, the Mount Li Sect Master, and the Prince of Xiang would break through one after the other, and even Mao Qiuyu is already at the threshold. And this isn't even counting Liang Wangsun, Xiao Zhang, your teacher, Xu Yourong, and Qiushan Jun. The number of human experts has quickly reached its former number, even exceeded it. Coupled with Shang Xingzhou's stratagems, when the time comes, just who in the continent could be their opponent? What will they do once they exterminate the demons? Or are you willing to see the subjects of the Demi-human race kneeling in front of the iron heels of humanity?"

Luoluo silently thought for a while, then said, "The Demon race should be even more concerned about this matter than we are."

Madam Mu replied, "Correct, so there is no need for us to doubt Xuelao City's sincerity and resolve."

Luoluo raised her head and said, "But what about the hatred between us? Mother, how did you convince the Council of Elders, the ministers, and the generals?"

Madam Mu said, "I have already convinced many people. Crucially, I have already convinced your father, so who will still object?"

Luoluo thought about how the Chief Elder had entered the mountain last night but failed to meet her father. However, upon returning, his attitude underwent a massive shift, as if he had guessed at something.

But this was not enough to convince her.

Perhaps it really was as Madam Mu said, that no one else in the Demi-human race would dare stand up and oppose this marriage alliance, but she still could.

She looked at Madam Mu and said, "If it's for the future of the Demi-human race, given the relationship between me and Teacher, the Orthodoxy will assuredly support us. When the time comes, even if the Great Zhou Imperial Court wants to invade, it would first have to resolve its internal matters."

Madam Mu replied, "You must first be sure that your teacher Chen Changsheng can gain victory in this war. Moreover, you must confirm that he and Shang Xingzhou truly are at odds with each other and that this is not a scheme used to deceive us and Xuelao City."

Luoluo answered, "Teacher is not that sort of person."

"It has already been five years since you and he have met. Five years is enough time to change many things. Moreover, the

teacher-disciple relationship in the backdrop of the world is not powerful enough or firm enough to influence the relationship between the Human race and the Demi-human race. You understand what I mean."

Madam Mu gave her a pitying gaze. "Unless he is willing to give up on Xu Yourong and marry you. If that were the case, I would immediately end the Heavenly Selection ceremony."

Luoluo opened her eyes wide and innocently asked, "Why would Teacher marry me? After all, I'm his student."

Madam Mu gave her a forced smile. "You only regard him as a teacher?"

Luoluo firmly nodded her head. "Of course."

Madam Mu caressed her head again and said, "Silly child, even if you can deceive me, how can you deceive yourself?"

The morning wind blew in through the window, bringing with it the smell of lime unique to the beast dances, as well as the increasingly excited, or perhaps elated, beating of the war drums.

Madam Mu left, going to the Allbeast Platform in front of the Imperial Palace to preside over today's Heavenly Selection ceremony.

Luoluo sat by the window, somewhat angry, her head lowered in dejection as she tore at the freshly picked gardenia flowers.

Madam Mu's last words were true. Even if she could deceive everyone in the entire continent, how could she deceive herself?

Chapter 947 – The Whole World Chooses

Guardian Li walked in, looking at Luoluo while hesitating to speak.

Luoluo knew what she was thinking, softly saying, "Mother and I think differently... This way won't be of any benefit to the Great Western Continent."

Guardian Li sadly said, "Is Your Highness really going to be married off to such a faraway place?"

The Princess of the Demi-humans was to be married off to Xuelao City. It had been more than two thousand years since such a thing had occurred.

Luoluo silently thought, if this really can prevent war from breaking out, perhaps it really might be fine. It's also good for Teacher, but...

That young Demon Lord probably won't participate in the Heavenly Selection ceremony, so why all that ruckus outside the palace? If even if that young Demon Lord really does marry me, he won't wait in White Emperor City to inherit the throne, so... just how will this story come to an end?

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The Great Western Continent's diplomatic mission had arrived and the Heavenly Selection ceremony had also begun. The Celestial Trees buried in the mists on both shores of the Red River began to let out a low drone.

Although it was rumored that the empress had already chosen the Second Prince of the Great Western Continent as Princess Luoluo's future husband, many young demi-human experts had traveled overnight through the mountains and forest to enter White Emperor City. The vast majority of them had entered White

Emperor City several days ago to make preparations.

Since the Council of Elders had succeeded in having the ceremony proceed according to the laws of the Demi-human race, everyone had a chance. As long as one was selected, they would be handed over to the Wildfire of the Celestial Trees for the ancestral spirits to choose. Could the ancestral spirits of the tribes possibly be biased to the outsiders of the Great Western Continent?

Early in the morning, the sun was still incapable of tearing apart the thick fog shrouding the banks of the Red River. It was still dim outside, but White Emperor City was already awake.

The swift cadence of the war drums rose from various places. The demi-humans of different tribes bowed to the giant trees barely discernible in the clouds and then began to dance.

As the ceremony continued, the nine massive trees gradually grew more distinct. The heat they produced could be felt from several dozen li away, like invisible flames were erupting from the ground and being spread across the world by the colossal trees.

As the war drums beat and the banners of various tribes fluttered in the streets of White Emperor City, the young experts from the vast domain of the demi-humans left the meeting halls of their tribes, accompanied by their elders and companions. Hope and anxiety could be seen on their faces as they walked towards the Imperial Palace at the highest point.

A dense sea of people gradually gathered, somewhat frightening in its uncanny silence. In the depths of this silent sea was a particularly eye-catching carriage, because the banner on this carriage was not an ordinary one but a princely one that was flapping in the wind.

Countless gazes fell on this carriage. No matter how confident and proud the various young experts from the demi-human tribes were, when they saw this princely banner, they subconsciously showed an expression of respect. This was because this banner

represented the supreme power of the southern lands of the Demi-human race, the Shi clan, and because there was a man sitting beneath this banner.

This man had an indifferent expression. His black hair drifted loose in the wind, and a harsh yellow light would occasionally flash through his eyes. His body exuded an extremely powerful, even frightening Qi. He was the most talented demi-human expert in the last two hundred years. Due to Wang Po's breakthrough and Xiao Zhang's fugitive status, he had now advanced to second place on the Proclamation of Liberation.

Xiaode was his name and Shi was his surname. He represented the will of the southern demi-humans, and more importantly, his own will was incredibly formidable. And it was no secret that in the last few years, his will was firmly set on marrying Princess Luoluo and becoming the next White Emperor.

To absolutely no one's surprise, while he had kept his silence in the turmoil of the last few days, he had now finally appeared.

If this level of expert wanted to participate in the Heavenly Selection ceremony, who could be his match?

The Great Western Continent's Second Prince was already awake and finished freshening up. He was reading a book when he seemed to hear something. He quietly thought for a few moments, upon which his lips curved into a mysterious smile. He put down his book, tied his bright yellow belt, and proceeded out of the Imperial Palace.

The fog had not dispersed, seemingly fusing with the yellow sands.

The young Demon Lord had not slept in his room but had instead elected to lie on the sand. His hands cushioned his head, one of his legs was raised, and his eyes were closed. He seemed very relaxed.

If others were to know of his identity, he would assuredly

encounter the most terrifying encirclement and assault, but he seemingly did not care. The increasing volume of the war drums also had no effect on his mood. After some time, he finally opened his eyes. Rising and flicking the sand from his body, he went to the back gate.

He quietly stared at the two stone statues as he took out a bamboo hat. Placing it over his head, he left.

The stone statues had also disappeared, with the places where they had stood now vacant. The sand drifting in the light morning breeze ultimately buried the golden blood of yesterday.

Xuanyuan Po had woken up very early. To put it more accurately, he had not gotten much sleep last night.

His room was currently occupied by that incomprehensible couple, so he had spent the entire night sitting in the courtyard.

But his lack of sleep had not been out of lack of comfort. He was just a little nervous about the events about to take place.

The beating of the war drums resounded in his ear, each strike urging him on his journey.

But before this, he still had some things to do.

This was a habit he had developed from his days living with Chen Changsheng in the Orthodox Academy.

The more important the task, the more calm one had to be. Even if one could not calm one's mind down, one had to at least carry out the most important tasks.

He opened the door and entered the room. Through the paper door, he asked, "I'm going to buy breakfast. What do you want to eat?"

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The nine massive Celestial Trees loomed in the mists, releasing

invisible yet assuredly real waves of heat.

There was no hurricane from the Western Sea, but the Red River began to slosh with massive waves, crashing with deafening might into the shores.

No demi-human felt fear, because they knew that this was caused by the massive monsters living within the Red River.

The massive monsters living within the Red River were called Jing. They had gigantic bodies but very gentle temperaments. They lived off the red aquatic grass that unendingly grew within the river, and never harmed any living creatures. The demi-humans regarded them as guardians. The massive waves on the Red River were the Jing sensing the transformation of the Wildfire and celebrating.

White Emperor City was also a scene of celebration. Although the rumors and the tense atmosphere of the last two days made them somewhat uneasy, the Heavenly Selection ceremony was still a rare grand occasion for the Demi-human race. The people put their anxiety in the back of their minds and began to dance along with the incessant beat of the drums.

The several hundred stone walls used to divide the districts were packed with people. It was like the walls had suddenly been heightened in the span of one night, though the work was rather untidy. When the people saw those youths walking towards the fighting platforms, they waved their arms, yelled, and leapt, and the newly heightened stone walls seemed to get a little higher.

It truly felt like the whole world was celebrating.

Chapter 948 – A Reason to Change

The Heavenly Selection ceremony was the most important event of the Demi-human race, but the offerings and celebrations concerning it were incredibly simple, which was very in accord with the personality of the Demi-human race. The morning wind had just begun to blow away some of the thick fog when it was announced that the offerings and celebrations were concluded, with the truly important and more attention-grabbing part of the process about to begin. The formal procedures were similarly simple. It was divided into three sections, with the first being tournaments carried out on the fighting platforms to decide the nine candidates who had the right to enter the Celestial Trees. In the second part, the nine candidates would use the trunks of the Celestial Trees to travel deep underground to be bathed by the Wildfire and receive the trial of the ancestral spirits. If more than one candidate succeeded in making it through this portion, another round of fighting would occur until the final victor was decided, and this would be the one called Heaven's Chosen.

Careful analysis of this process would reveal the good intentions of countless generations of demi-human ancestors. For the sake of simplicity, when the regulations of the Heavenly Selection ceremony were first established, it would have been perfectly fine to place the trial of the ancestral spirits in the last phase, but the current rules made it so that the Heavenly Selection still ultimately depended on one's own power. That the Demi-human race had managed to survive in this savage and dangerous environment until now and even gradually grow stronger had never been because they had relied on the protection of their ancestors or the pity of the heavens. It was because of their will that surpassed the heavens.

It was based on these concepts that even though they knew that they had no chance of becoming the final victor, many young

experts from the tribes still participated in today's Heavenly Selection ceremony.

Several dozen fighting platforms were distributed in various districts and tribal gathering grounds within White Emperor City, waiting for warriors to come forward.

The Carp tribe, the fairest tribe of the Demi-human race and the most skilled with numbers, had dispatched many of its most experienced members to judge the outcomes. Meanwhile, both the Demi-human Court and the Council of Elders had dispatched supervising officials to record the events at each fighting platform with the added benefit of being able to bring up questions at any time.

All the demi-human citizens of White Emperor City had already left their homes, heading towards the fighting platforms to see a once-in-a-century spectacle.

The fighting platforms with the most focus on them were the ones in the vicinity of the Imperial Palace and Heavensguard Pavilion. The crowds were so packed that even a drop of water would find it hard to make its way through.

These fighting platforms drew so much attention because they were closest to the Imperial Palace's observation platform, so the Empress and the powerful figures of the Council of Elders were more likely to notice the fights taking place on them. The people who dared to step onto these platforms naturally did not include anyone mediocre. The competitors were assuredly individuals of widespread fame, like Xiaode.

The crowd parted like a tide as Xiaode was escorted to the fighting platform by the elders and experts of his tribe. Along the way, many people yelled out to add to his might.

Demi-humans believed that the strong were worthy of respect, and as the expert publicly acknowledged as the strongest of the middle generation, Xiaode was extremely renowned along the two

shores of the Red River. Moreover, his tribe was also extremely powerful, with many supporters in the Demi-human Court and the Council of Elders. In the view of many of the common people, even if the Empress privately favored her nephew, the final victor in this Heavenly Selection ceremony would assuredly be Xiaode. Moreover, only a person like him had the right to marry the princess, the right to become the next sovereign of the Demi-human race.

Xiaode walked onto the fighting platform, glanced at his opponent, and expressionlessly said, "You are no match for me."

His personality had always been cold and arrogant, even somewhat callous and ruthless. He naturally did not speak politely.

But this was still a sign that his personality had already undergone a great change, as he would have been too lazy to even speak to his opponent before.

His opponent was a middle-aged expert of the Meng clan. On another fighting platform, he perhaps might have been able to go very far, but his luck was somewhat disastrous. In his first battle, he encountered the legendary Xiaode, so it was hard for him to hide a little regret and reluctance in his eyes.

Since he was well aware that he was no match, he logically should have conceded. However, this middle-aged expert of the Meng clan did not do this, because demi-humans possessed a most valiant will to fight. They valued reputation above all, even over their lives. He said to Xiaode, "If everyone withdraws because they are no match, then Sir will regretfully not encounter a single challenge today."

The Meng clan expert expressed his respect towards Xiaode in these words and also made his stance known.

The indifferent yellow glow in Xiaode's eyes slightly faded and a pleased expression appeared on his face. "You aren't bad. I will use all my strength."

The Meng clan expert was not panicked by these words. On the contrary he felt honored, saying, "Thank you."

Xiaode took off his cape and threw it off the platform. Gazing at his opponent, he said, "You first."

The first match of the Heavenly Selection ceremony began in this utterly conventional manner.

Everything the demi-humans did was very straightforward and simple, perhaps even violent, whether it was eating or doing business, in political battles or real battles.

Just like the countless battles that took place every day on the shores of the Red River, today's battles proceeded without any originality whatsoever.

Deafening collisions, explosions of dust, the quaking of the ground, and the howling of the wind.

The result of this battle was similarly dull. Completely according to expectations, Xiaode won. Moreover, he had realized the promise he had made before the match, no strength held back in his punches and kicks. With the most violent of dispositions, he had needed only three techniques to severely wound the Meng clan expert.

The blood on the yellow sands of the fighting platform was rather hair-raising. Many of the Meng clan expert's bones had been broken and he lay on the ground, his eyes closed, his death imminent.

A physician of the Demi-human Court and several military doctors with boxes of medicines hurriedly came up to the platform, but the Meng clan expert had been too heavily injured. It even took some time before they were finally able to stop his bleeding.

In any other match or celebration, the Daoist Church of the Western Wastes would have dispatched priests. The Sacred Light

technique was very effective on wounds like this and it would presumably have been possible to save the Meng clan expert's life. However, today was the Heavenly Selection ceremony, and that the Orthodoxy did not come to make trouble was already quite the consideration. It was out of the question for them to dispatch priests to assist.

Upon seeing that the Meng clan expert was beyond treatment, the crowds around the platform gradually ceased to cheer, becoming rather quiet. Demi-humans revered the strong and loved to fight, so this sort of sight was extremely common. However, when they thought about how this Meng clan expert of exceptional strength was about to die, the people couldn't help but feel a little strange.

"After you cure him, remember to tell him that he has to return the money used to pay for the medicine."

Xiaode suddenly took a pill of yellowish brown hue and threw it into the hands of the Demi-human Court's physician. After impassively saying those words, he took his leave of the fighting platform.

The Demi-human Court physician stared blankly at the yellow pill, and then with an expression of disbelief.

The people around the platform began to whisper amongst each other and then cry out in shock.

"Could it be the Yellow Tree Thorn?"

"It couldn't be, right?"

The Yellow Tree Thorn was a pill made from the sap of a rare tree in the southern demi-human lands, possessed of the miraculous properties of staunching blood and reviving one's soul. Few were made, making them extremely precious.

Other than the small number of pills sent to the Imperial Palace and the Council of Elders each year, the vast majority of the Yellow

Tree Thorns were in the hands of the Shi clan.

As the expert nurtured and supported by the entire Shi clan, Xiaode naturally carried the Yellow Tree Thorn on his person. However, no expected that after he severely wounded the Meng clan expert, he would so liberally use this precious pill to save his opponent's life.

As they watched Xiaode descend the platform, the crowd was stupefied. They felt like his figure was even taller and stronger than rumored.

No matter how ardent the gazes from his surroundings or how reverent the voices around him were, Xiaode appeared unmoved, his visage still apathetic.

The matches on the fighting platform continued and there was still some time until his next match. Walking through the crowd, he was escorted by the experts of his tribe to his carriage.

The clan elder had been sitting in the carriage this entire time.

The clan elder looked at Xiaode with a rather strange expression, tinged with relief, indifference, and confusion. "You've changed a lot in the last few years."

Xiaode quietly thought for a while, then said, "Change is because there is a reason to change."

Chapter 949 – The Young Man Wearing a Bamboo Hat

No one knew the reason for Xiaode's change, because no one had ever asked him, not even the Shi clan leader.

All of the Demi-human race knew he was callous and temperamental, even though he truly had changed a lot.

However, many important personages of the Demi-human race had already guessed at the reason.

This was because Xiaode had begun to change several years ago, upon his return from the distant capital of the Human race.

During the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, he had allied with Painted Armor Xiao Zhang and the Tang Second Master to invade the Great Zhou Imperial Palace. In that bloody battle, both his mind and will had endured the most harrowing of ordeals.

But this was not the moment Xiaode began to change, as he was part of the winning side.

What truly affected Xiaode and stimulated his change was the events of one winter's day.

When the capital was shrouded in snow, Chen Changsheng went to kill Zhou Tong.

Xiaode received Madam Mu's order and cooperated with the Great Zhou Imperial Court to stop him from killing Zhou Tong and to also use this chance to kill him.

At the time, Xiaode had been stronger than Chen Changsheng in both cultivation level and strength, and he was even assisted by many Star Condensation assassins.

But the end result was Zhou Tong dead, executed by a thousand cuts.

Chen Changsheng had not died, had not lost.

Although many things had taken place that day, not just a battle between Xiaode and Chen Changsheng, this matter had still inflicted Xiaode with an enormous sense of defeat.

He did not understand why this was.

Why was it that Chen Changsheng was so much younger and so much weaker and yet was still able to pull off such a feat?

He very seriously pondered this matter for a long time but still could not reach a conclusion.

Since he did not understand, then if he acted as Chen Changsheng did, would something happen?

The so-called changes had probably begun from that point.

There was no reason for change more sufficient than this.

His personality shift, and the Yellow Tree Thorn, were all because of this.

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To the north of Heavensguard Pavilion was the Imperial City.

The fighting platform there was closest to the Imperial City.

The Great Western Continent's Second Prince stood on this platform.

This was because he had walked out of the Imperial City and he had no desire to walk too far.

He only needed to go through the motions, but the end was already decided. There was no need to walk so far and tire his feet.

Not long after Xiaode won his first match, the Great Western Continent's Second Prince also won. This victory was just as expected, just as casual.

From start to finish, he had a casual smile on his lips.

He did not say a single word, nor did he give a precious pill to his opponent. His opponent was barely injured, able to walk off the platform under their own power.

Since they could walk off the platform, they naturally still had the energy to fight. Given how the demi-humans loved to fight and valued reputation, his opponent could only retreat because they had not seen a single chance of victory in their battle. The discrepancy in strength had pulverized their confidence.

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The morning fog gradually dispersed. The morning sun hung over the mountains like a red ball playing pretend.

The Imperial Palace's observation platform was on the east side, and was the highest place in White Emperor City besides the three stone halls in the Imperial Palace. By standing on the platform, one could look down upon every place in the city.

White Emperor City today was rather strange, the majority of districts quiet and deserted while several dozen areas were extremely lively. These were where the fighting platforms were located, and the stone walls around them were so packed that the figures looked like ants from a distance.

Several hundred Red River Beast Guard kept watch on the events below, their hands tightly gripping leather ropes. The other ends of these ropes were tied to the necks of black vultures. If anything strange happened below, they would descend on the black vultures and suppress it with the fastest speed. They were even more convenient than the flying carriage used last night to search for fugitives.

The important figures observing the ceremony on the observation platform appeared slightly surprised, many of them

looking at a certain elder.

The one who had lost just now came from this elder's tribe. They had been famous and powerful and had been the opponent that several factions in the Council of Elders had intentionally arranged for the Great Western Continent's Second Prince.

Yes, many important personages in the Demi-human race were not willing to see the Empress's nephew become the next White Emperor.

Although the Wildfire of the Celestial Trees could remold one's body and soul, although the impartiality of the Heavenly Selection ceremony was unquestionable, if they were unwilling, they were unwilling.

Several demi-human elders had made several plans which they had believed could easily stop the Great Western Continent's Second Prince. They had not expected the first match to be lost in such a way, and had nothing to say.

The Second Prince had still not revealed his true strength, so would their following plans be of any use?

The gazes of many other important figures fell on that mountainous figure.

The Chief Elder was truly deserving of his position as leader of the Xiang clan. Just like his long-lived brethren, he valued every moment of rest.

At this moment, his eyes were closed as if he was sleeping. Was he truly not worried?

All of a sudden, the Chief Elder opened his eyes and looked towards the fighting platform on the meadow on the western side of the Heavensguard Pavilion.

His eyes were serene and without ripples. He was not like the oldest wells, but the most serene of pools. Yet right now, a flash of cold appeared in this pool.

Several elders of powerful cultivation also sensed something, looking to the platform on the meadow with surprise.

The Chief Elder turned to glance at an even higher place. He silently thought for a while, then closed his eyes, continuing to rest or sleep.

The only place higher than the Imperial City's observation platform was the stone hall. Madam Mu sat in a stone chair in front of the hall, looking down upon White Emperor City with an impassive visage as if she had sensed nothing.

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Heavensguard Pavilion was where the demi-humans held their spring ceremonies. Like the Imperial Palace and the vast majority of buildings in White Emperor City, it was built from stone, though it did have a green river running around its perimeter. This, coupled with those trees that were over a thousand years old, made the place seem quiet and serene. The meadow to the west appeared especially beautiful in the morning light.

The meadow and the river cordoned off the many spectators far from the action. As a result, they could not clearly make out what had happened on the platform, as their view was even inferior to that of the important personages on the Imperial City's observation platform. They only knew who had won and lost.

The one in charge of determining victory and defeat was an old man of the Carp tribe. As he looked at the person still standing on the platform, he wanted to say something, but his resolve suddenly failed and he only shook his head.

The loser of the match had already been taken away. Although they had suffered no external injuries, they had fallen unconscious through some mysterious method, giving the match a bizarre atmosphere.

The person on the platform himself was very bizarre. The bamboo hat he wore completely obscured his face, but everyone could feel that he was very young. Moreover, this person naturally exuded a cold and sinister Qi that not even the gradually strengthening light of the sun or the morning winds could dilute.

A member of the Council of Elders responsible for supervising the matches squinted at the young man as he sternly asked, "Which tribe are you from?"

Chapter 950 – No One Knows of This Youth

The young man in the bamboo hat asked, "Does the Heavenly Selection require one to give their identity?"

His voice was very flat, like water, a calm and rippleless pool of water. However, if someone of truly powerful cultivation were present, they might be able to hear that this was not water, but ice—an ice that had been frozen for ten thousand years.

The distant crowd was in an uproar, no one having expected this person's response to be so cold and unswerving.

The Heavenly Selection seemed to refer to the heavens making a choice, but from its rules, one could see that it was really about one's strength. Whether one won through the protection of the ancestral spirits or through one's own strength, one's identity or background were not required. All Heavenly Selection ceremonies since time immemorial had never required such a thing.

The member of the Council of Elders found himself momentarily at a loss for words. He angrily looked at the young man and said, "Then I hope that you can keep on this bamboo hat until the end."

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The sun gradually brightened. Even in the deep winter, it still had some warmth.

The red sun over the distant mountains rose higher and higher. The moist fog that had shrouded the two shores of the Red River was completely swept away, leaving a clear and bright scene of breathtaking beauty.

The matches on the fighting platforms in White Emperor City were also in full swing. The fights were incomparably splendid, with dangerous moments constantly taking place.

In the streets, on the stone walls, by the meadows, and in front of the Imperial City, the demi-human commoners loudly and constantly cheered, occasionally punctuated by a burst of gasps.

Many famous young demi-human experts defeated their opponents, but there were also many dark horses.

A few of the people nominated by the tribes that lived deep in the mountains displayed a surprising level of strength.

The several fighting platforms closest to the Imperial Palace and Heavensguard Pavilion were naturally the center of everyone's attention. Though somewhat quieter, the gazes were even more focused.

As the Heavenly Selection ceremony proceeded, the vast majority of gazes fell on three fighting platforms.

Three people stood on their respective platforms.

Xiaode, the Great Western Continent's Second Prince, and a young man in a bamboo hat.

As the strongest of the Demi-human race's middle generation and the Empress's nephew, Xiaode and the Great Western Continent's Second Prince should have been the focus of the crowd. However, at this moment, even more gazes, especially the gazes of the important personages standing on the Imperial City's observation platform, were aimed at that young man in the bamboo hat.

This young man was far too mysterious.

Up until now, other than his registered name of doubtful veracity, no one knew a single thing about his background. The young man seemed to have some sort of magical power. Before any of his opponents had a chance to attack, right when they stepped onto the fighting platform, they would bizarrely collapse into unconsciousness.

The young man had won four matches by this point, and neither the Carp tribe enforcer in charge of judging victory nor the

member of the Council of Elders supervising the matches had been able to see what sort of technique he had used. Not even the great general of the Demi-human Court, Chong Xinghe, had been able to detect anything when he came especially to watch the third match.

Just who was he? What tribe did he come from?

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When the vast majority of gazes were watching the Imperial City and Heavensguard Pavilion, when an extremely small number of important personages who knew the truth were looking with mixed expressions at the young man in the bamboo hat, a few events also took place on a remote fighting platform. It was just that they did not attract anybody's attention at the time.

This fighting platform was set up in the impoverished Pine Paths district of White Emperor City. It was far from the center and very close to the river, and as the Jings jumped and splashed in the Red River, they raised countless stench from the sludge of the river bottom which assailed the shore with the wind. With such a vomit-inducing smell, just what expert would be willing to come here?

In the early morning, when the war drums were just beginning to sound in the upper city and spread to Pine Paths, the sand covering the fighting platform that had been built of stone overnight began to tremble. But besides the judge from the Carp tribe, two supervisors, and other related officials, the area was deserted.

Although the entire world celebrated the Heavenly Selection ceremony, life still had to continue, and those lower-class people living in the Pine Paths still had to go to work, or else they would have to go hungry tonight. Compared to an empty stomach, the matches of the fighting platform, though interesting, would have to be put aside for later.

Before heading off to work, they naturally had to fill their bellies

first. All sorts of crude stone stoves began to let off smoke. In the deep fryers, in which the oil was going black after being used for quite a few days, various sorts of floury foods were beginning to swell and then throw up bubbles. Meanwhile, the demi-human commoners who had not even washed their faces yet yawned as they stood in line.

Xuanyuan Po had not slept much last night, so he woke earlier than the rest. As a result, he managed to buy breakfast ahead of the morning rush.

The courtyard in the depths of the alley was a little misty, a consequence of the pot of water on the stove.

The area behind the paper door was also a little misty, a consequence of the sacred aura released by the piping hot steamed buns and meat buns coming from the opened paper bag.

Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi were eating steamed buns.

Xuanyuan Po was eating a meat bun. This bun was not much smaller than his face, and when he took a bite, fragrance and meat juices began to drip out.

Wuqiong Bi had a nasty complexion as she asked, "Why is it that you're eating meat buns while we're eating steamed buns?"

Xuanyuan Po couldn't be bothered to answer. He continued to eat his meat bun, occasionally sucking the dripping meat juices from his fingers. It looked delicious.

Wuqiong Bi's complexion turned even nastier, her voice shriller. "You're doing this for us to watch, aren't you! Scram!"

Xuanyuan Po continued to ignore her.

After a night of adjustment, Bie Yanghong had recovered a little of his energy, but that aura of death about his face was still impossible to disperse.

He looked at Xuanyuan Po and asked, "What sort of filling is in

this meat bun?"

"Beef and scallion," Xuanyuan Po mumbled out.

Bie Yanghong sighed. "It truly smells nice."

Xuanyuan Po finally reacted, hurriedly swallowing his food. He then seriously explained, "Sir, I was not intentionally inciting your cravings. It's just that Principal said that after being seriously injured, you should not eat oily foods. Sir should finish drinking the porridge, but there's no need to eat the steamed bun."

By 'Principal', he naturally meant Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng had always emphasized his health, so all the people of the Orthodox Academy, Xuanyuan Po included, had been deeply affected.

Bie Yanghong chuckled.

Wuqiong Bi loathingly said, "Eat your meat bun and stuff yourself to death!"

Xuanyuan Po ignored her, continuing to explain to Bie Yanghong, "I have to use a lot of strength today, so I need to eat a little more."

Although heavily injured, Bie Yanghong still had a very sharp spiritual sense, so he could clearly hear the drumbeats and chatter outside. Upon hearing Xuanyuan Po's words, coupled with how he had said last night that he needed to do some things in the next few days, he had an inkling of what was happening. He asked, "You are going to participate in the Heavenly Selection ceremony?"

Wuqiong Bi had an eccentric personality, but also a vast store of experience. She knew the significance of the Heavenly Selection ceremony to the Demi-human race and slightly froze. Immediately after, a jeering smile appeared on her face as she taunted Xuanyuan Po, "Even a simple bear like you has the crazy wish of marrying the White Emperor's daughter?"

Despite Xuanyuan Po's excellent temper, he still found this

statement somewhat difficult to take. He said in a muffled voice, "And what do you know?"

Wuqiong Bi's gaze fell on his clearly withered and strengthless right arm as she sneered, "I only know that you're a cripple."

Bie Yanghong had also noticed the strange appearance of Xuanyuan Po's right arm, but his response was different from Wuqiong Bi's. Surprise on his face, he asked, "You cultivate the Heavenly Thunder Bringer?"

Chapter 951 – With the Heavenly Thunder Concealed, Who Can Recognize It?

Xuanyuan Po was somewhat shocked. No one had ever recognized the method he cultivated, but Bie Yanghong had exposed it with a single question.

Seeing his expression, Bie Yanghong knew that he had guessed correctly. "Was this method selected for you by Chen Changsheng?"

Xuanyuan Po nodded.

Bie Yanghong praised, "I always felt that his talent in cultivation was superb, but I didn't realize that his insight was similarly excellent. He makes for a very competent principal."

Xuanyuan Po thought this over, then replied, "That's hard to say."

Bie Yanghong glanced at his right arm again and said, "I can see that you've practiced it quite well, but you've apparently had a few problems."

Heedless, Xuanyuan Po used some paper to wipe up the remaining meat juice on his fingers.

Bie Yanghong spoke once more, his voice entering Xuanyuan Po's ears and straight into his heart.

"The Heavenly Thunder Bringer means concealing the Heavenly Thunder, concealing the thunderstorm so that it leaves no sign. You aren't wrong on this point and can even be said to have cultivated it superbly."

Bie Yanghong added, "But you've made it somewhat too deliberate."

Xuanyuan Po raised his head and asked in surprise, "What is Sir saying?"

Bie Yanghong looked at him and said, "A tree will plant its roots deep within fertile soil, not letting them be seen by the heavens and earth, not suffering the hardships of the strong winds. Refined by earthfire, it gradually begins to crackle with thunder. It accumulates energy, waiting for the moment where it will break out of the soil and suddenly become a massive tree that soars to the heavens, its leaves flashing with arcs of lightning. What person could withstand such might?"

Xuanyuan Po's gaze followed Bie Yanghong's gaze to his own right arm.

His right arm was clearly withered, standing out in stark contrast to his sturdy left arm, making it appear particularly miserable.

Many patrons of that small tavern believed that this was an old wound from his defeat at the hands of Tianhai Ya'er in the capital and had jeered him about it many times.

Only he knew of the terrifying strength hidden in his seemingly crippled right arm.

Of course, someone had now seen through it.

Xuanyuan Po finally realized that the person in front of him was an expert of the Divine Domain, a legendary individual of the Storms of the Eight Directions.

He immediately turned serious, seeking instruction. "What does Sir mean by 'deliberate'?"

Bie Yanghong explained, "The peal of thunder is a natural law of the world. One can only conceal its intent and must not conceal the shape. It would be like when the heaven-soaring tree rose up in a single day covered in thousands of years of dirt and stone. While it seems imposing, it has lost the most important characteristic."

Xuanyuan Po continued to ask, "Might I ask Sir what this characteristic is?"

Bie Yanghong asked, "What is the external method of the

Heavenly Thunder Bringer?"

Xuanyuan Po immediately replied, "The fist."

Bie Yanghong smiled. "I just so happen to have some understanding of this."

In the great battle in the Mausoleum of Books, he had personally witnessed the world-shaking fist of the Tianhai Divine Empress, leading to a great revelation.

In the last few years, he also began to use the fist. Thus, in the world after Tianhai, there was no one stronger than him in the fist.

Naturally, there was no one else more learned and experienced in this aspect as well.

"Why is it that the Divine Empress did not use the Wooden Phoenix or the ruyi, but used her fist to contend against us?"

Bie Yanghong calmly stared into Xuanyuan Po's eyes and said, "That is because the fist is a part of the body, rising and falling according to our desires. Compared to swords, spears, and all other external objects, one can at least open and close with more speed, and speed... is strength."

Xuanyuan Po's eyes brightened.

The Demi-human race revered pure strength more than the Human and Demon races, and as a member of the Demi-human race, he was no exception. However, this was not the reason he was moved by Bie Yanghong's words. It was more because these words had revealed to him a very important principle.

Whether it was a Daoist technique, a sword style, or an array, they were all used for battle. All of them shared the same root, ultimately pointing to speed and power. No matter how gorgeous and dazzling the sight, how powerful the momentum, there was intrinsically no difference.

Concealing the thunderstorm allowed the most strength to be accumulated, but just like Bie Yanghong said, it would also affect the speed at which techniques could be used.

How could one simultaneously maximize both aspects?

Xuanyuan Po voiced his questions.

Bie Yanghong used the precious experience he had obtained from his centuries of cultivation and countless battles to explain.

Xuanyuan Po became more and more focused, even forgetting to breathe.

The room became abnormally quiet. The wind blew in through the cracks in the paper door, lightly rustling the crystals and three pagodas on the floor.

If not for Wuqiong Bi's impatient snort, this instruction in the Dao might have persisted for quite some time.

Xuanyuan Po came to his senses, prostrated to Bie Yanghong, then left the room.

As he stood on the wooden floorboards outside the room and gazed at the occasional wisp of cooking smoke rising from beyond the courtyard, he quietly thought for a very long time. Gradually, Bie Yanghong's words began to fuse with his own experiences in cultivation, allowing him to resolve many problems in his cultivation. He could even feel that he was approaching a certain boundary.

He took in a deep breath and then traversed the white cobblestones to the well. He used a wooden ladle to water the short pine tree, then lowered his head and used the chilly water in the well to wash his face. After verifying that he was completely sober, he wiped the water off his face and left the courtyard.

The beating of drums continued to resound from the upper city.

The beating of the waves from the Red River grew louder and

louder, closer and closer.

Pine Paths was already awake and his neighbors were yawning and picking at the crust in their eyes. Holding jars, they were still standing in line to buy breakfast.

A few laborers who had already finished eating were sitting on a long bench outside the porridge store, their feet raised as they talked. They seemed completely unaware of the drumbeats coming from the upper city or the roaring waves from the nearby Red River. This did not mean that they were not interested in the Heavenly Selection ceremony. Quite a few people were chatting about which fighting platform they would go to after finishing their work.

Xuanyuan Po walked over from the street.

A few women from the neighborhood that he was acquainted with asked if he had eaten breakfast, to which he smiled and nodded in response. A laborer that he was acquainted with asked him how business was doing at the small tavern and whether the boss was willing to sell a cup of coarse ale for only two strings of cash again. He shook his head, indicating that he didn't know.

Afterward, the owner of the meat bun stand casually asked him where he was going so early in the morning.

He stopped and replied, "I'm going to participate in the Heavenly Selection ceremony."

For a second, the street was quiet. Even the steam rising from the steamers seemed to pause for a few moments.

Laughter ensued and continued for some time. Moreover, it grew louder and louder, tinged with ridicule or amusement, kindness or malice.

Xuanyuan Po rubbed the back of his head and heartily laughed.

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The fighting platform Xuanyuan Po went to was in the Pine Paths, so close that he could walk. He didn't need to ride a carriage, saving him some money.

By the time he reached the street where the fighting platform was located, it was already surrounded by spectators. However, the list of participants did not even fill two pages.

This was a remote place, far from the Imperial City and Heavensguard Pavilion. No important figure was keeping watch on this place and no formidable fighter could possibly appear here, so there were no naturally no experts here who wanted to challenge themselves. The people willing to register at this platform were often people who had no interest in the Heavenly Selection ceremony, just demi-human commoners who wanted to fight a little. There was nothing too special about battles between ordinary demi-humans and they seemed more like marketplace brawls. After a few careless rounds, they would give up.

The Carp tribe judge for this platform and the two supervisors found these matches exceedingly uninteresting, and the officials from Pine Paths were even more bored. The minor official in charge of registration even began to feel drowsy, his head occasionally drooping down. It seemed like his head might knock against the edge of the table at any moment.

Xuanyuan Po walked up to the table and lightly rapped on it.

The minor official was startled awake. Angrily raising his head, he wanted to speak a few words of reprimand but froze.

1. 'To bring', 引, and 'conceal', 隱, share the same pronunciation.↵

Chapter 952 – One Punch

The minor official recognized Xuanyuan Po.

Xuanyuan Po was also surprised, because he recognized the minor official.

Just a few days ago, in the small tavern, this minor official had gotten thoroughly drunk and then said many vicious words to him.

Looking at Xuanyuan Po, the minor official asked in shock, "What's a kid like you doing here?"

Xuanyuan Po pointed at the register on the table and replied, "They said that I needed to register my name here."

The minor official stared blankly at him for a while before finally asking, "You want to participate in the Heavenly Selection?"

Xuanyuan Po affirmed, "Yes."

The minor official couldn't help but laugh, jeering, "A cripple like you also wants to marry Her Highness?"

Xuanyuan Po denied, "I have never thought about marrying Her Highness, but I do want to participate in the Heavenly Selection."

The minor official gave him a contemptuous gaze. "It looks to me like you want to seek your death."

There were not many participants at this fighting platform and Xuanyuan Po's extremely large physique was quite conspicuous, attracting the gazes of quite a few people. Now, with the official's laughter and derision, even more people looked over. Pine Paths was quite a small place where it was easy to run into acquaintances, and there were several frequent patrons of the small tavern in the crowd. Upon seeing this scene, they quickly walked over. When they learned of Xuanyuan Po's intentions, they were stunned and quickly advised him to give up on the idea.

"I say, have you gone crazy? This isn't play-fighting!"

"Didn't you hear that the Daoist Church of the Western Wastes didn't send a priest this time? The fighting platforms in the upper city have the doctors from the court and the Council of Elders keeping watch, but what will you do if you get injured here? There's no one here to treat you, and if you start bleeding nonstop, you really will die!"

"Even if people usually ridicule you, why take such a risk to prove yourself?"

Xuanyuan Po was quiet, not responding to these concerns. Seeing this, the patrons ceased their exhortations.

The minor official again jeered, "If you insist on seeking death, that's on you. Though when you get on the platform, don't cry too hard."

Xuanyuan Po took the brush and wrote his name and some other information on the register. He then took a cloth strip and tied it to his right wrist.

Time slowly passed and it was finally his turn to step onto the fighting platform.

The crowd around the platform conversed about what his background might be.

A handler from a gambling den recalled the earlier sight and squeezed his way to the registration table. He asked the official, "Should I keep an eye out?"

The minor official sneered, "He's just a dishwasher who brags that he's gone to the capital before and thinks that he's such an outstanding person."

One of the patrons who had attempted to stop Xuanyuan Po earlier commented, "He really did go to the capital."

The official was furious at being corrected, his face reddening as he shot back, "And so what? Even if he was strong before, he's nothing more than trash now!"

The chilly breeze of the morning dispersed the smoke and steam of the Pine Paths, also blowing against the cloth strips on the arms of the fighters.

Xuanyuan Po had a tall and sturdy figure, but his opponent was even burlier.

This burly middle-aged man glanced at Xuanyuan Po's withered stick of a right arm, scorn appearing on his face as he said, "My sympathies to you for meeting someone like me at the very start."

After he said this, his body began to creak as it grew larger, becoming a small mountain that cast its shadow on the platform.

The spectators were stupefied at this sight, thinking, why did someone from the Xiang clan come here?

Regardless of generation, the Xiang clan had always been one of the three great clans of the Demi-human race. Even the most ordinary member of this clan possessed an unimaginably divine strength.

Logically speaking, a descendant of this great clan should have gone to the fighting platforms near the Imperial Palace and Heavensguard Pavilion. Why did he come to a small place like the Pine Paths?

The judge from the Carp tribe narrowed his eyes, quickly understanding the reason.

The supervisor from the Council of Elders seemed asleep, his eyes closed. It was obvious that he had known of this matter beforehand.

The official from the Demi-human Court sensed the powerful Qi exuded by the Xiang clan descendant's body and arched his brow as he thought, with this sort of strength and the secret techniques of the Xiang clan, two years of diligent practice will be enough for this person to enter the Red River Beast Guard. For this sort of person to come to the Pine Paths to participate, he seems to have

quite some ambition.

Upon thinking this, the official looked towards Xuanyuan Po with a very complicated gaze.

He had not heard the quarrel that had taken place earlier and did not know the background of this composed youth of the Bear tribe. He just felt that since this youth clearly had a crippled arm but was still willing to participate in the Heavenly Selection, the youth truly had a praiseworthy courage. It was just a pity that his first match was with an unbeatable opponent. It truly made him feel sorry.

Xuanyuan Po had no idea what this official of the Demi-human Court was thinking, and even if he did, he wouldn't care.

Similarly, he did not care for his opponent's words. It was still early morning and only his first match on this fighting platform. If he wanted to walk to the front of the Imperial Palace, it would only be after a very long time and many more battles. It was the same reason he had chosen to go to the fighting platform in the Pine Paths: he needed to economize his time.

Thus, he did not speak a single word to his opponent, nor did he maintain the silence of a true expert, patiently waiting for his opponent to make the first move. Instead, he walked over, his footsteps somewhat rushed, making him look panicked to the spectators.

The Xiang clan descendant viewed him with even more disdain.

Xuanyuan Po raised his fist and punched.

His right arm was very shriveled, its sleeve battered about by the wind.

He used his left fist.

Straight and unremarkable, there was nothing special about his fist. His punch was also mediocre, seemingly devoid of technique and more akin to a careless blow.

The Xiang clan descendant had not expected his opponent to attack without any sort of warning. His eyes flashed with anger as he roared and responded with a punch of his own.

The Xiang clan descendant had a body as stalwart as a mountain, his fist of proportionately massive size, a boulder rumbling down from the mountain peak.

The giant fist blasted through the air, howling with a gale and glimmering with shards of starlight. It had a stunning momentum.

Xuanyuan Po's fist was distressingly normal in comparison, lacking any momentum to speak of.

The two fists approached, and as they were about to meet, the contrast grew all the starker.

The Xiang clan descendant's colossal fist made Xuanyuan Po's fist look quite pitiful.

Some spectators could not bear to witness the ensuing tragedy and turned around.

Xuanyuan Po did not turn his head; his eyes didn't even blink. He seemed incredibly composed, or even dull-witted.

Had he been frightened silly by his opponent's fist, or he was such a fool that he hadn't even reacted yet?

Some of the spectators pondered these questions.

The minor official stood up from behind his table and stared at the fighting platform with malicious anticipation.

The official from the Demi-human Court had been paying attention to the match the entire time. He was confident that Xuanyuan Po had not been scared silly, nor had he failed to react in time. This was because Xuanyuan Po's breathing had not been affected.

Thus, he found it impossible to understand why Xuanyuan Po did nothing but continue to punch in the face of his clearly stronger

opponent.

If it wasn't out of absolute confidence, then was it out of pride and honor?

With this in mind, the official suddenly found himself admiring Xuanyuan Po's courage.

In these malicious, or cruel, or reluctant, or pitying gazes...

Xuanyuan Po's fist finally clashed with the Xiang clan descendant's fist.

On a superficial level, the difference between these two fists was enormous.

When their fists collided, it was like a pebble running up against a boulder.

If one considered the discrepancy in power, it was like a chicken egg crashing into a boulder.

There was a soft sound.

It was a crack, like an egg really had shattered.

To the astonishment of the crowd, Xuanyuan Po's fist had not shattered, nor had it been sent flying like a pebble being struck by a boulder.

His fist and the Xiang clan descendant's fist were firmly pushing against each other.

His fist seemed so small, but just as steady.

There was a dense profusion of sounds that gradually more distinct, then deafening.

Clackclack!

Like that cliff that had split open yesterday.

Boom!

Like the cliff falling into the Red River and jolting up countless

massive waves.

Waves of Qi exploded from the platform, transforming into fierce gales that howled and stirred up a cloud of dust.

A smear of boundless terror appeared in the Xiang clan descendant's eyes as he howled in pain and despair.

The winds dissipated with plaintive howls, the last remnants winding around the platform, ruffling Xuanyuan Po's somewhat vacant sleeve and ultimately falling on the Xiang clan descendant's body.

The mountainous body seemed to gradually shorten under this gentle wind, and then collapsed.

The Xiang clan descendant sat paralyzed on the platform, his right arm hanging strengthlessly at his side, blood trickling out of the sleeve.

The light crack and the ensuing cracks had all been the sounds of breaking.

When his fist met with Xuanyuan Po's, the first things to touch were his fingers.

And so his fingers broke.

And then his wrist bone broke.

Then his arm bones broke.

Finally, even his shoulder bone broke.

His face was abnormally pale, his eyes brimming with fear. His body was drenched, though it was hard to tell whether it was with sweat, blood, or something else.

Xuanyuan Po drew back his fist, not issuing another attack.

Seeing this, the Xiang clan descendant knew that he would survive. His eyes went from fear to confusion and then gradually lost focus.

In the strength that he was most proud of, he had unexpectedly thoroughly lost.

He couldn't even think about revenge. Xuanyuan Po had simply been too strong, so strong that it was inconceivable.

This unimaginable discrepancy had crushed all will to fight in his body, overwhelmed his mind to the point of collapse.

He began to vomit, throwing up the entirety of his breakfast onto the platform, and a terrible odor gradually spread over the area.

But both the judge of the Carp tribe on the platform and the two supervising officials seemed unable to smell it.

The ordinary officials around the platform as well as the spectating crowd were dumbstruck.

Just who was this bear youth?

Why did that seemingly ordinary and unremarkable fist contain such terrifying strength?

Chapter 953 – A Blade Faster than Sound

Under countless shocked gazes, Xuanyuan Po descended from the fighting platform. He walked to the registration table and asked the minor official, "Might I ask how long it will be until the next round?"

The minor official recalled the battle just now and inadvertently lowered his gaze as if wanting to prevent their eyes from meeting. However, this meant that his eyes saw Xuanyuan Po's fist instead.

That ordinary fist that contained that terrifying strength.

The minor official paled as his trembling hand flipped through the register. After perusing it for quite some time, he finally managed to say, "After this, there are still... seven matches."

His voice was somewhat shaky, though it was hard to say whether it was out of fear or something else.

Xuanyuan Po did not notice these particulars. After considering how long seven matches would take, he walked out of the crowd.

Many curious gazes followed, their owners thinking, he just won his match, so where is he going now?

The minor official somewhat calmed down. His loss of control just now made him somewhat furious from shame, with two blooms of unhealthy red appearing on his pale face.

Suddenly, there was an uproar, and countless people looked to the fighting platform.

The winner of this match was a thin, middle-aged man. He had an indifferent expression and wielded a chilling blade.

The minor official was shocked to see this middle-aged man, thinking, why did such an evil person come to the Pine Paths fighting platform?

He suddenly thought of a possibility. He hurriedly flipped

through the register and the tournament bracket, confirming that this thin man was Xuanyuan Po's next opponent.

He finally relaxed, his entire being feeling free of worry. He gazed at Xuanyuan Po, who was walking off to do something in the streets, and resentfully thought, even if you really do have some brutish strength, so what? It'll only get you through one round, and in a little while, you'll still end up being hacked to death!

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The Heavenly Selection ceremony was a grand event of the Demi-human race. Though far from the city center, the Pine Paths fighting platform was also very lively. Moreover, the matches which the crowd originally thought would be lackluster also featured many twists and turns. In the seven matches after Xuanyuan Po's victory, true experts appeared in all of them, each match splendid to the extreme.

The impoverished folk of the Pine Paths did not understand what was going on, but the Carp tribe judge and the officials from the Demi-human Court and the Council of Elders had long since guessed at what was going on.

Many experts of the Demi-human race did not harbor the extravagant hope of becoming the final victor in the Heavenly Selection ceremony and becoming Princess Luoluo's husband. However, they still wanted to do their utmost to rank highly in the ceremony, for the glory of both themselves and their tribes. If they could gain the right to enter the Celestial Tree and be baptized by the Wildfire, nothing could be better.

These experts were well aware that if they went to the fighting platforms near the Imperial Palace or Heavensguard Pavilion, it would be very difficult for them to last until the end. Thus, they had intentionally chosen the most remote of the fighting platforms in the Pine Paths. It was all for the sake of avoiding opponents who

were at the same level or even stronger, so that they could last a little longer, walk a little further.

It now appeared that quite a few experts had this idea, like the Xiang clan descendant who Xuanyuan Po had defeated or the ten-some formidable individuals who had appeared in the following matches. But compared to the fighting platforms around the Imperial Palace or Heavensguard Pavilion, the difficulty was still much lower.

As these experts took the stage, one after the other, the matches grew more intense. When the last of the seven matches concluded, the crystals responsible for maintaining the fighting platform's protective array needed to be replaced. From this, one could imagine how fierce the battles had been, especially after two extremely famous demi-human experts took to the stage. The spectators grew more and more spirited, and the platform was surrounded by cries of surprise. The shock brought upon by Xuanyuan Po in the first match was greatly diminished, but from time to time, the official from the Demi-human Court and a few commoners would glance at the edge of the crowd. When they saw Xuanyuan Po holding a paper bag, they began to speculate as to what was inside.

Without a single noise, the red sun overcame the peaks of the mountains on the opposite shore, shining upon the surface of the river. The last wisps of morning fog in White Emperor City were finally expelled. At this point, the various fighting platforms had all essentially concluded their first rounds, and the Pine Paths was no exception. It was soon Xuanyuan Po's turn to once more take the stage.

Xuanyuan Po's figure made the spectators recall that mountain-shattering fist. They instantly broke into cheers, with those neighbors and laborers who knew him and were on break hollering out to encourage him. But when Xuanyuan Po's opponent appeared on the platform, the cheers and cries of encouragement quickly

quieted down.

Xuanyuan Po's opponent was a thin and middle-aged man, precisely the one that had participated in the match after his.

The crowd was clearly somewhat afraid of this middle-aged man. A cold smile appeared on the face of the minor official at the table. Even the Carp tribe judge and the two supervising officials on the platform couldn't help but shake their heads, their moods rather mixed.

This thin, middle-aged man was from the Nie clan and was called Nie Chi. He was a true demi-human expert and was extremely famous on the two shores of the Red River. He had vast quantities of true essence and a blade style as cruel as his personality. Few opponents who lost to his blade were able to walk away alive.

In the first round, his opponent had been beheaded by one strike of his blade. The supervising official from the Demi-human Court had not even had the time to shout 'stop'.

This demi-human expert wielded the blade with incredible speed, like a bolt of lightning. It was even rumored that he had once said to a companion that although he was inferior to Wang Po in the cultivation of the blade, solely in terms of speed, not even Wang Po's blade might be as fast.

"Your strength is truly not bad, but it is still far from enough."

Nie Chi impassively said to Xuanyuan Po, "Because you are too slow."

These indifferent words were actually most overbearing, and they truly were very reasonable.

No matter how much strength one had, if one could not keep up with an opponent's speed, how could one wound them?

These words made Xuanyuan Po pensive.

He had not become uneasy or lost his confidence. He was just

thinking about what Bie Yanghong had said this morning before he left the courtyard.

Speed was strength.

How should one interpret these words?

Speed was essentially a method to use strength.

True experts were certainly not people with limitless strength but no understanding as to how to use it.

How could one convert strength into speed? If he were given some time to properly comprehend Bie Yanghong's words, then perhaps...

There was no 'perhaps'.

No time, either.

A blinding and cold ray of light exploded in front of Xuanyuan Po's black pupils.

It was a blade glow.

Although he had expressed quite some disdain in his words, Nie Chi was still rather fearful of Xuanyuan Po's strength, so he had not given Xuanyuan Po any time to prepare.

He wanted to use his fastest blade to cut off Xuanyuan Po's head.

This blade truly was very fast, with the momentum of a galloping horse and the energy of a bolt of lightning.

Only after the blade glow had transformed into a gleaming tip in Xuanyuan Po's eyes did he finally hear the blade being unsheathed.

With a zing, the sharp and cold blade flew through the air.

By the time the crowd heard this, the blade was already half a foot from Xuanyuan Po's neck.

Chapter 954 – Another Punch

The wind had not even had time to blow or the crowd to blink, much less gasp.

The blade was already in front of Xuanyuan Po, about to sever his neck and bring his head down.

The official from the Demi-human Court had already prepared himself but realized to his consternation that Nie Chi's blade was still faster than he had expected, that he was still too late to stop him. The minor official at the registration table had also prepared himself, but he still could not suppress the joy in his heart, though there was not enough time to form a smile.

It was such a short span of time that sound did not even have time to spread. All around the fighting platform was an eerie stillness fraught with an atmosphere of terror.

Ultimately, an extremely clear sound broke the silence and returned time to its normal speed.

It was not the shlink of a blade, not the rolling of a head off the neck, but a meaty thud.

It was like the sound of a rotten fruit crashing onto the ground in a pulpy mess.

It was like a leather bag of wine crushed flat as the Xiang clan leader sat upon it.

It was like a fist smashing into mud.

Yes, this was the sound that was the most similar, because this was almost exactly what had happened.

Nie Chi's blade was like a bolt of lightning, but Xuanyuan Po's fist was even faster.

No one was able to even see his fist, not even a blur.

When the blade was only half a foot from his neck, his fist had

already smashed into Nie Chi's face.

The unimaginable power of the fist was fully transmitted.

Nie Chi's face began to deform. His nose sank, his eye sockets burst, his chin fractured. Countless streams of blood issued from his face like a blossoming flower.

Beneath Xuanyuan Po's fist, his face was like a pool of mud.

His neck broke at almost the same moment, his head flipping backwards to hang over his back.

It was like a ripe, red fruit hanging off a tree branch.

This scene was somewhat strange and utterly terrifying.

Nie Chi lived up to his reputation as a demi-human expert, as he did not die on the spot. His ruptured throat made a few incomprehensible sounds as his body swayed on the platform. Finally, it fell to the ground, and as fetid and nasty juices splashed, he died.

Both on and off the fighting platform was a deathly stillness without the slightest noise.

The Carp tribe judge looked at Xuanyuan Po with a dazed expression.

The spectators, who still had not even had the chance to gasp, were struck dumb, forgetting to cry out.

The minor official, intending to celebrate Xuanyuan Po's death, finally smiled, but it was even more unsightly than if he was crying.

Xuanyuan Po gazed blankly at his own fist.

He then looked at Nie Chi's corpse and shook his head. "You were too fast."

In today's Heavenly Selection ceremony, he had never thought about killing anyone.

But his opponent's blade had been too fast, his killing intent too vicious.

How could one convert strength into speed? How could utilize strength to its absolute limit?

Bie Yanghong had said to not be too deliberate.

Follow one's heart to move.

Follow one's heart to strike.

Although there had been no formal ceremony, Xuanyuan Po had once acknowledged Luoluo as his teacher, and Luoluo was Chen Changsheng's only female student.

On this basis, he belonged to the lineage of Xining Village's old temple. Moreover, he was a student of the Orthodox Academy and had lived together with Chen Changsheng for a long period of time.

Whether one followed one's heart or acted according to one's heart, it was all cultivating one's heart, and the heart was the only Dao in the world that could not be cultivated.

When he had said that his opponent's blade was too fast, it was not a sarcastic remark, but the truth.

The blade was too fast for him to consider, too fast for him to think. He could only move according to instinct.

No thought was necessary. Only by moving before thinking could one truly follow one's heart.

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Xuanyuan Po walked off the fighting platform.

The crowd parted like a tide.

The Demi-human Court official slightly arched his brow as he looked at Xuanyuan Po. He summoned a subordinate and ordered him to investigate Xuanyuan Po's background.

In the first match, Xuanyuan Po had relied on his strength to beat the Xiang clan descendant silly, which was already enough to stun him and the official from the Council of Elders.

But this in no way compared to the shock delivered by this battle. Because Nie Chi was a true demi-human expert.

When the Demi-human Court official saw Nie Chi's lightning-fast blade, he became extremely sure that not even he was a match for Nie Chi.

Yet Nie Chi had lost to this bear youth's fist!

If Nie Chi was a true expert, then what was this bear youth?

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Xuanyuan Po walked up to the small table.

This was his third time today coming to this table.

He noticed that the minor official's complexion had already changed many times.

At the start, the minor official's face was all disdain and derision, then it was shock and evasion, and after that was shame and anger.

Now, this minor official was ghastly pale, like he was suffering from a cold. But he was also sweating profusely.

When Xuanyuan Po walked to the table and cast his shadow on him, he began to sweat in streams, instantly soaking his clothes.

An official on the side asked in concern, "Cao Si, are you okay?"

Xuanyuan Po finally learned the official's name.

The minor official mumbled out a few words. He attempted to

wipe the sweat off with his sleeve, but this was far from enough.

Xuanyuan Po knew the cause, but he didn't much care. After confirming a few details on the register, he left.

The minor official raised his head and stared at Xuanyuan Po's back, unable to suppress the memories of the words he had said in the small tavern several days ago.

He had been deeply inebriated at the time and had forgotten most of it, but today's events had given him such a fright that he could now clearly remember those words.

"Isn't this a cripple!"

"Do you really believe the boasts of a cripple like this? And an expert of the Tianhai clan... He might as well just say it was Tianhai Shengxue!"

"Bear cub, stop right there!"

"Just look at his arm. This is a cripple without a single bit of strength, only good for washing dishes. And he has the nerve to say that he was a supervisor of the Orthodox Academy?"

"That's the Orthodox Academy we're talking about here! If you have that capability, what are you doing washing dishes here?"

When he thought about all the nonsense he had said to this person, his sweat began to stream down even faster.

And then he remembered that he had even spit in front of this person, at which point he began to feel dizzy, almost passing out.

Xuanyuan Po walked out of the crowd and to the corner of the street, then he took out a beef bun from his bag and began to eat.

After the first battle, he realized that matches were truly exhausting, so he went to the steamed bun shop and bought the last tray of beef buns.

As expected, even though he had only made two punches, he felt absolutely starving.

The buns were already cold, the meat juice somewhat congealed, so they weren't that tasty anymore, but he ate them with great diligence.

The crowd watched him with equal diligence.

Intense matches were still taking place on the platform, but nobody cared.

Everyone was looking at the street outside, at Xuanyuan Po, at his hands.

It was like the meat bun in his hands was the world's tastiest delicacy.

Chapter 955 – Like a Rock

The Heavenly Selection ceremony truly was a very simple process, and also a fast one. As the matches proceeded, each round would halve the number of participants, causing the ceremony to progress even faster. While still early in the day, over half of the selection process had been completed.

The victors had already been decided in many fighting platforms, and were now engaging in fierce competitions according to the districts they were assigned to. On the other hand, the fighting platforms in the vicinity of the Imperial Palace and Heavensguard Pavilion had long since finished the selections for their final candidates, with no one daring to issue any challenges to them.

Xiaode, the Great Western Continent's Second Prince, and the mysterious young man in the bamboo hat stood on their respective platforms.

The demi-human populace gazed with respect and worship at those figures on the platform that, though seemingly lonely, were actually proud.

The most attention was still focused on Xiaode. As the number one expert of the Demi-human race's middle generation, the strength he had exhibited in his matches had been far too frightening. Not even the Vice Commander of the Red River Beast Guard or several demi-human generals had been able to last more than a few exchanges against him.

His victory was completely within expectations.

With Wang Po's entry to the Divine Domain and Xiao Zhang's being wanted by the Great Zhou Imperial Court, Xiaode was now ranked second on the Proclamation of Liberation.

The continent's experts of the Divine Domain naturally would not participate in the Heavenly Selection. The secluded elders of

the sects of humanity's south would also not so shamefully request to marry Princess Luoluo, so unless Liang Wangsun himself came or the several high-ranking Divine Generals of the Great Zhou took part, who could defeat Xiaode?

The vast majority of the ordinary people in White Emperor City thought the same.

The one that would be able to marry the princess, endure the baptism of the Wildfire, and become the next White Emperor naturally had to be Xiaode.

Xiaode knew more secrets than the common herd, but he still thought the same.

An expert of the continent required exactly this sort of self-confidence. More importantly, no matter what the Empress thought, no matter what sort of political battle was taking place behind the Heavenly Selection ceremony, since the ceremony was being conducted according to the traditional rules, he could not lose, because no one could defeat him.

He calmly stood on the fighting platform, feeling the gazes surrounding him. He did not lose himself in them, nor was he annoyed.

The other figures on the fighting platforms were just as calm, whether it was the young man in the bamboo hat, the Second Prince of the Great Western Continent, or the other demi-human experts. They were all truly important individuals, so they were used to being the focus of the crowds.

At this moment, they only needed to quietly wait, wait for the last few candidates to appear.

As for whether those candidates would affect them, they didn't care. Those who could fight their way out of so many battles were assuredly not simple people. What sort of people could those distant and impoverished districts produce that could threaten

them?

At this moment, a few commoners looked down with curious gazes.

The Imperial Palace and Heavensguard Pavilion were located at the highest point of the city. If one wanted to walk to them, they would need to take the winding roads up the slopes or walk up the Stairway to Heaven that ran down the center of the city.

A thumping sound came from the bottom of the Stairway to Heaven, like the sound of war drums.

The crowd knew that it probably wasn't war drums, because there was still quite some time until dusk, when the Heavenly Selection ceremony would conclude. So what was the sound? Why was it so heavy, but also so exciting that even the Qi of the Wildfire seemed to grow more powerful?

The water around Heavensguard Pavilion suddenly began to ripple. The young man in the bamboo hat quietly watched, seemingly seeing something in the ripples.

The Second Prince of the Great Western Continent watched the dust rise from the bricks in front of the Imperial City and slightly raised his eyebrows in thought.

Xiaode looked in the direction of the Stairway to Heaven, his expression slightly stern as if he had sensed something.

Experts like them had naturally realized long ago that the sound coming from below was not that of war drums, but footsteps.

The problem was, just how many people needed to be walking that the vibrations they made could make the water around Heavensguard Pavilion ripple, make the dust of the bricks in front of the Imperial City stir?

Just how orderly were these people marching that there was no extraneous noise, that it sounded like the beating of war drums?

More and more people were looking down below.

Gradually, those gazes that had been full of respect or adoration towards Xiaode and the Great Western Continent's Second Prince turned into shock.

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Many commoners appeared on the Stairway to Heaven. They wore plain and simple clothes, with some of them wearing rather tattered clothes, and all of them exuded a rather foul stench.

They clearly came from the lower city, perhaps even from the riverside district.

The sumptuously-clothed residences of the upper city would definitely have jeered at the tattered clothes of the impoverished folk on any other occasion. As for those noble young ladies with their spice bags, they would definitely have covered their mouth and nose upon smelling the stench of sweat coming from these poor people and regard them with a contemptuous expression. But today, they did not do this, because there were far too many poor people.

The Stairway to Heaven was so packed that it was impossible to count the number of people in the crowd. This subconsciously made them afraid.

The crowd silently walked upward like an encroaching tide, drowning the Stairway to Heaven and flowing towards the Imperial City.

The officials responsible for maintaining order naturally thought of the term 'mass uprising', and their expressions instantly changed. But they immediately realized that this was not the case. Although the impoverished crowd from the lower city had zealous gazes, there was no madness, only reverence and yearning.

Did these commoners want to use the Heavenly Selection

ceremony to come to the area in front of the Imperial City that was normally forbidden to them to see the spectacle?

This was also not right, because there was no cowardice or anxiety on the faces of this crowd. On the contrary, they seemed particularly proud.

Crucially, this impoverished crowd did not even glance at the imposing grandeur of the Imperial City. They only looked forward.

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At this sight, many important personages of the Demi-human race creased their brows, including the one seated in front of the stone hall at the highest place, Madam Mu.

A minister of the Demi-human Court asked with a gloomy face, "Just what is going on here?"

An official had already gone to inquire when this crowd left the lower city, so the cause was quickly confirmed.

An official reported, "Apparently, they are following a candidate."

The minister asked in surprise, "What sort of person could the lower city produce? Even if there is someone formidable, why would so many people follow him?"

It was quite normal for the common people to follow a victorious candidate to the Imperial City to see the excitement.

But what was abnormal about today was that too many people from the lower city were following this candidate.

And this crowd had a somewhat different mood from the usual.

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The impoverished crowd from the lower city did not look at the Imperial City, did not look at Heavensguard Pavilion. They only looked forward.

In front of them was a person.

This person was a very normal bear youth, so composed that he almost seemed dull-witted.

This bear youth wore a clean and simple set of clothes and had an ordinary face, with no distinctive features.

But many important individuals had already noticed that the crowd from the lower city maintained a deliberate distance from this bear youth.

If one were to call that crowd from the lower city a tide, the bear youth was a rock that all sea water retreated from in fear.

This distance might also be symbolizing respect.

The lower city crowd looked towards this bear youth with eyes brimming with respect.

Besides respect, there was also passion and a smear of confusion.

It was like they had suffered such a shock that they even now had not completely shaken it off.

Just what in the world had happened?

Chapter 956 – The Same Twilight Glow

"His opponent in the first match was a descendant of the Xiang clan. The two competed in pure strength and the Xiang clan descendant lost."

On the high observation platform within the Imperial City, the Carp tribe judge in charge of determining victory slightly bowed his body. The observation platform was otherwise empty, the members of the Council of Elders and the high officials of the Demi-human Court currently in the gloomy confines of the stone hall, pensively considering the files that had just been sent in.

Upon hearing the Carp tribe judge's words, many of them looked towards the giant mountain of a figure at the highest seat.

The Chief Elder was also the Xiang clan's leader.

Why had a descendant of the Xiang clan gone to participate in the Pine Paths? And he had even lost?

The Chief Elder's eyes remained shut, as if he was sleeping, giving no reaction to these words. The powerful individuals in the hall shook their heads and they turned their attention back to the files. One high official suddenly said in astonishment, "His opponent in the second match was Nie Chi?"

These words caused a burst of whispered discussion within the stone hall, and it was obvious that this was a surprise to everyone else in the hall. To these important personages of the Demi-human race, Nie Chi was nothing much, but he was still a famous expert, which made them think, if it really is him, how did he lose?

"Nie Chi was blasted to death, because his blade was not faster than his opponent's fist."

The Carp tribe judge did not wait to hear the gasps of surprise from the hall. Lowering his head, he continued, "In the third match, the opponent was Han Xiaodao."

A stunned voice came out of the hall. "Wait a moment. Is the Han Xiaodao you are speaking of the one that we all know?"

The judge's voice trembled as he replied, "Yes, and then he also lost."

Another person anxiously asked, "And after that?"

The Carp tribe judge was quiet for a few moments. Apparently, the psychological impact of those matches had still not completely worn off.

"The fourth match was Wu Yu. He also lost."

"Wu Yu?" In shock, the person asked, "Are you sure? How could he possibly lose?"

At this moment, an official noticed those resounding names on the file and frowned. "Wait a second. This official does not understand. Why is it that so many experts appeared in a remote fighting platform in the lower city?"

The judge lowered his head even further, not replying to the question.

None of the official's colleagues or any of the members of the Council of Elders answered his question.

This coincidental silence concealed a rather embarrassing meaning.

Many of the powerful individuals in the stone hall knew the answer, because they were the ones who had made these arrangements.

Other than mighty individuals like Xiaode, the clan elders and the officials of the Demi-human Court had no hopes of gaining the final victory in the Heavenly Selection ceremony, marrying the princess. They only wanted to use this opportunity to allow the young experts of their clans or tribes to become candidates and obtain the right to enter the Celestial Trees. As long as they could

be baptized by the Wildfire and receive the blessings of the ancestral spirits, they would be able to become much stronger, with even a chance of breaking through in a short time.

It was for this reason that all these influential figures had coincidentally sent all the young experts who were not too conspicuous but were also very talented to the lower city districts, which received little attention. They hoped that this would increase the chances of avoiding strong enemies, allowing them a chance at obtaining one of the three spots allotted to the lower districts.

This was a very reasonable course of action, and many tribes and clans thought the same. From a certain perspective, they had still ended up clashing with each other, but the competition in the lower city districts was still easier than around the Imperial City and Heavensguard Pavilion.

But no one had expected it to end this way.

The young experts that the tribes and clans had burdened with their hopes had all lost.

They had lost to a very ordinary bear youth.

All of a sudden, an elder sternly asked, "Even if he did manage to miraculously win six consecutive matches and then represented the Pine Paths in winning the general selection of the Three Heaventrees District, obtaining a spot, why did he come alone? Aren't there three spots for the lower city districts? What about the other two?"

He was the leader of the Deer tribe, and today, he had furtively placed his beloved bastard son into the Southern Country District, hoping that he could use this chance to grant his bastard son the right to enter the Celestial Tree. He had learned earlier that his bastard son had won, so why had he not appeared?

"That fellow represented the Pine Paths in battle to take the spot

of the Three Heaventrees District, and then he went to Star Riverbay and Southern Country."

The Carp tribe judge recalled those sights, unable to suppress his sigh as he continued, "He snatched away both spots."

The stone hall was quiet for a while, clearly out of shock and confusion. After a while, the Deer tribe leader angrily roared.

"Just what does this fool want to do! Was taking one spot not enough! Doesn't he know that you can't transfer these spots!"

This was something that many elders and officials could not understand. Since he had already obtained the spot belonging to the Three Heaventrees District, he could enter the Celestial Tree tomorrow to be baptized by the Wildfire. Why had this fellow not loosened his grip, and had even run off to Star Riverbay and Southern Country to fight two more tournaments?

Although the rules of the Heavenly Selection ceremony did not forbid this, although this fellow really might have been very strong, the truly powerful opponents had not yet appeared. What meaning was there in doing this besides consuming true essence and wasting his energy?

"I do not know." The Carp tribe judge recalled the words that fellow said when walking onto the fighting platform and hesitantly said, "Apparently it's because... he doesn't like anyone else participating in the Heavenly Selection ceremony. As long as someone is participating, he wants to strike them down."

What sort of reason was that? It was utterly incomprehensible.

Suddenly, a cold voice said, "What I don't understand is how he won."

This was not actual confusion, but disbelief, suspicion.

It was clear that many important personages of the Demi-human race, this official included, found this matter far too strange, causing them to be very doubtful.

But the judge was thinking of something else, absent-mindedly saying, "He used the fist."

"The fist?"

"Yes, whether he was facing Nie Chi, Han Xiaodao, or some other expert, he only used one punch."

"One punch?"

"Yes, every time he stepped onto stage, he would make one punch and then his opponent would fall over."

The stone hall was quiet for a long time, with not a single person speaking.

It was still not that dusky, the sun still above the horizon, but the wind was somewhat chilly.

The Carp tribe judge stood on the observation platform, his clothes blowing in the wind, a blazing banner in the light of the sinking sun.

From morning to dusk, countless matches had been conducted in the Heavenly Selection ceremony.

But it was clear that the most important matches today were the nine matches taking place in the lower city districts.

In these nine matches, that fellow used a total of nine punches.

One punch for each match.

One punch to defeat his enemy.

What sort of concept was this?

What sort of sight was this?

Slightly stern looks on their faces, these important personages thought in silence.

Yes, no matter how charming or bold the person, no matter how much of a ruckus they could create, it was not possible for the impoverished denizens of the lower city to follow this person so

silently and with such order, to look at him with such passion and respect.

The problem was that this fellow was not an expert dispatched by the tribes or clans, but a true person of the lower city. It was clearly written in the file that he had lived in the lower city for many years, that he was a laborer. He had been a painter before and was now washing dishes in a tavern.

The influential figures within the hall were extremely estranged from the lower classes, but they were well aware of what this meant and how dangerous it was.

"Just who is this fellow? His name looks somewhat familiar."

As these words broke the silence, countless gazes fell on a certain place in the hall.

A stalwart figure was in this corner, but just like the Xiang clan leader, this person had remained silent from start to finish, as if he was sleeping. But at this moment, neither the elders nor the high officials of the Demi-human Court would permit him to continue sleeping.

Because he was the leader of the Bear tribe.

The Bear tribe leader slowly said, "Don't look at me. I did not arrange this, nor do I have the right to make arrangements for him. As for who he is... all of you should know. If you've even forgotten his name, what right do you have to sit here?"

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Very quickly, people learned what had happened in the lower city.

The richly dressed residents of the upper city looked towards that person with deep respect and fear.

The beautiful and delicate ladies gazed at the figure with fire in

their eyes.

As for the six other candidates who had also gained the right to enter a Celestial Tree, they each viewed this figure with different emotions.

Some of them looked with fear, others with a murderous intent.

The Second Prince of the Great Western Continent had a slightly solemn gaze, his thoughts inscrutable.

The young man in the bamboo hat was looking towards the Imperial City, his thoughts also inscrutable.

Xiaode calmly gazed at this figure, thinking about the battle reports that he had just received.

He was sure that he had never met this bear youth before, so why did he give off a familiar feeling?

Several thousand denizens of the lower city stopped on the plaza in front of the Imperial City, just like a tide.

There was a vacant space in front of the crowd, causing that rock of a figure to stand out more.

The important personages on the observation platform did not say a word.

The Empress seated even higher also said nothing.

This was tacit approval.

The high official managing the Heavenly Selection ceremony asked, "What tribe are you from? Report your name."

The names of all participants had already been recorded, so reporting one's name was just a traditional custom to verify the candidate's identity. Declaring one's tribe, on the other hand, was a sort of honor.

The Imperial City was quiet, countless people watching, wanting to know the answer.

"Bear tribe. But today, I am not fighting for my tribe."

The twilight glow illuminated his face, appearing like the light shining off a lake.

The great banyan tree was on one side of the lake, the kitchen on the other.

He squinted, though it was hard to say whether it was because of the dazzling light or because he was giving an honest smile.

"Orthodox Academy, Xuanyuan Po."

Chapter 957 – If There Is a Task, Let the Student Undertake It

It was very quiet in front of the Imperial City, so the conversation between the official and Xuanyuan Po was heard loud and clear by everyone present.

Orthodox Academy? Xuanyuan Po?

It was still quiet, though the silence this time did not last too long before it was broken by whispered conversations. These whispers grew louder and louder until they became a clamor, splashed with quite a few cries of surprise. Finally, it became the howling of a raging tide.

The crowd remembered a rumor from many years ago.

It was said that an exceptionally gifted youth of the Bear tribe journeyed eighty thousand li to the capital of the Human race, successfully entering Star Seizer Academy, one of the Six Ivy Academies. But he was then crippled by a youth of the Tianhai clan, yet this disaster was his fortune, as he then entered the Orthodox Academy. It was even bandied about that he had become Princess Luoluo's student!

In these two years, this story of almost legendary proportions had been the topic of many a leisurely chat, that bear youth becoming the object of envy for many other demi-human youths. Yet as time passed, the situation changed, and with the final conclusion, this story and the bear youth were gradually forgotten. When someone occasionally remembered this rumor, they would just shake their heads and sigh.

But today, in the Heavenly Selection ceremony, the lower city crowds surged in front of the Imperial City like a tide while he stood at the very front, like a rock. He attracted everyone's attention, telling all the world that he was the bear youth of that

story, and he was still representing the Orthodox Academy.

The entire place was roaring with discussion, countless people staring at Xuanyuan Po, wanting to know just what the main character of this rumor looked like. They wanted to know even more just why he had suddenly disappeared several years ago, and, if the rumor was true, didn't he escape from the Orthodox Academy? Why was he fighting for the Orthodox Academy today? What sort of problem might occur if the Pope were to learn of this?

There was a minor turmoil around the Imperial City as several dozen priests entered the plaza. These priests consisted of both demi-humans and humans. The vast majority were dressed in priestly robes of black, a few of them were dressed in Daoist robes of blue, and there was one wearing holy garments of red: the archbishop.

Seeing these solemn and indifferent priests, many people inadvertently lowered their heads into a bow and yielded the way.

Ever since a few days ago, the gates of the Daoist Church of the Western Wastes had been tightly shut. Everyone in White Emperor City understood why, and they had even heard that the archbishop had torn up his invitation to the banquet meant to welcome the prince from the Great Western Continent. Why had these priests and the archbishop abruptly appeared in front of the Imperial City?

The archbishop brought the several dozen priests over to Xuanyuan Po.

This scene coupled with the ending to that rumor made the populace feel both nervous and excited.

What happened next was a complete surprise.

The archbishop did nothing. He simply walked to Xuanyuan Po's side and stood there. The several dozen priests spread apart, cutting off Xuanyuan Po from the crowd, especially from the Red

River Beast Guard and the officials. It was clear that they were protecting him.

Immediately after, another turmoil took place as the several stewards from the Tang clan's company, seemingly ordinary yet giving off a most valiant aura, walked in from the outside. After bowing to Xuanyuan Po and the archbishop, they stood behind them.

After a while, the ambassador from the Great Zhou's embassy also arrived. Although he had rather mixed emotions, struggling and hesitant, he still walked over to Xuanyuan Po's group and positioned himself on the other side of Xuanyuan Po.

Xuanyuan Po was of the Bear tribe, but his identity today was a student of the Orthodox Academy.

Whether it was the archbishop, the ambassador, or the stewards of the Tang clan's company, they still did not know how the Li Palace, the Imperial Court, or Wenshui City and the south planned to respond, but at this tense and sensitive moment, they had to make their positions explicitly clear.

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The ending of that rumor was that the stupid and shameless bear youth saw that the Principal of the Orthodox Academy, who was the current Pope, Chen Changsheng, was about to be killed by the Tianhai Divine Empress, the Orthodox Academy about to be destroyed. Thus, he fled.

The appearance of the Great Zhou's ambassador, the stewards of the Tang clan, and especially the Archbishop of the Western Wastes declared to the world that the ending of this rumor was false.

Xiaode gazed at the distant Xuanyuan Po, his two brows slightly raised.

He knew of Xuanyuan Po's name, but that was the extent of his knowledge.

The 'legend' that had once been the talk of the demi-human populace had not even been worth mentioning to influential figures like him.

In the Orthodox Academy of those years, Xuanyuan Po was undoubtedly the least remarkable, the most ordinary. Tang Thirty-Six, Su Moyu, and Zhexiu were all more famous, and this wasn't even considering Princess Luoluo and Chen Changsheng.

Xiaode had not expected that Xuanyuan Po would suddenly appear today and gather together such a powerful force. He couldn't help but be a little wary over this. It appeared like Xuanyuan Po had hidden himself in White Emperor City for many years. Could it possibly be that Chen Changsheng and the Orthodoxy had made preparations long ago for this day?

Many powerful figures of the Demi-human race thought the same thing as Xiaode. The palace hall behind the Imperial City's observation platform was abnormally quiet. The Bear tribe leader disregarded the gazes of his colleagues as he rose and slowly walked out of the hall. The Chief Elder on the highest seat still seemed to be sleeping.

The only person with the right to sit higher was Madam Mu. She knew that Xuanyuan Po had been living in White Emperor City all this time, and she had even dispatched guards to keep watch on him for a very long time at the start. But Xuanyuan Po's continued inactivity led to the guard gradually being loosened. Now, he had suddenly reappeared. However, she thought differently from Xiaode, the elders, and the ministers. She could guarantee that neither the Orthodoxy nor the Great Zhou Imperial Court had time to react, let alone make advance preparations. Logically speaking, there was nothing that she needed to worry about, but she had clearly heard those words just now.

"Orthodox Academy, Xuanyuan Po."

In the end, this fellow was a student of the Orthodox Academy. Might this affect her plans in some way?

A faint killing intent flashed across Madam Mu's eyes.

When the Heavenly Selection ceremony began, Luoluo was standing at a high place and gazing at nine Celestial Trees in the distant mountains, quiet and thinking of nothing.

When all of White Emperor City was intoxicated by the matches, Luoluo began her noontime nap. She was using the freshest of incense, so she slept very soundly.

As twilight descended and the candidates who had obtained the right to be baptized by the Wildfire of the Celestial Trees were just about to be announced, she was drinking tea, appearing very calm.

She did not suppress her emotions, nor did she feign them.

This was because of her innate noble air, and it was also because her teacher had taught her that one needed to be calm before a great undertaking.

She was truly very calm, as she simply did not care about the Heavenly Selection ceremony. No matter what the final result was, what her father and mother thought, what the Council of Elders, the ministers, or the people thought, what the Demon race or Human race thought, as long as she was not willing, she would not accept.

She had once heard Mo Yu talk about the Divine Empress's evaluation of... her teacher's wife.

If her teacher's wife could do it, she naturally could as well.

The reason she had not expressed any objection and had only been quietly waiting was that she knew that objections were meaningless. The more important reason, however, was that she had always been waiting for her teacher to come. If her teacher did

not come, no, if her teacher could not come, no, if her teacher was too late...

In the end, she would leave, bidding farewell to the Imperial Palace, this city, and the Red River, never to meet again.

She held the tea cup and glanced at the stone pearl on her wrist as she silently thought.

At this moment, Guardian Li rushed over, a complex expression on her face as she said, "Seven victors."

"Nine Celestial Trees, so why are there only seven victors?"

Luoluo thought that there was undoubtedly some scheme behind this. In her vexation, she lightly took a sip of tea.

Guardian Li hesitated, then said, "One of them is Xuanyuan Po."

With a pffft, Luoluo spat out her tea.

Chapter 958 – Xuanyuan, Expose

Xuanyuan Po was participating in the Heavenly Selection ceremony? He had won nine matches in a row? He was going to enter the Celestial Tree tomorrow to receive the baptism of the Wildfire and the trial of the ancestral spirit?

Luoluo was so shocked at this news that she spent quite some time in a daze.

She took a silk towel from Guardian Li and wiped off the tea, but she failed to unfurrow her brows.

She knew that the moment the news of the Heavenly Selection ceremony was spread, Xuanyuan Po would assuredly do something. Thus, she had dispatched people to keep a watch on him, but seeing as he had not done anything in the last two days, she thought that there was nothing she needed to worry about. How could she have expected Xuanyuan Po to register for the Heavenly Selection himself!

She could not understand why Xuanyuan Po had participated in the Heavenly Selection ceremony.

It was more in line with his personality to take up a kitchen knife and charge into the Imperial Palace to try and save her.

"Just what is this fool trying to do?"

Guardian Li gazed at Luoluo's furrowed brows and internally sighed in deep concern.

She thought of a possibility, but it was truly a difficult one to accept.

Xuanyuan Po loved the princess?

But the princess loved the Pope.

How could all the people of the Orthodox Academy be like this?

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Upon learning of Xuanyuan Po's identity and background, countless people stared at him.

The sumptuously dressed denizens of the upper city and the aloof young ladies looked with mouths agape, so astonished that they didn't know what to say. As for the lower city crowd that had followed Xuanyuan Po, they had already known some things, but after having it all confirmed, they found it impossible to suppress their excitement.

On the other hand, the high official supervising the Heavenly Selection had an extremely unsightly expression. He looked at Xuanyuan Po's face which, though bewhiskered, still had a childish air. His voice was slightly cold as he said, "Why have you participated in the Heavenly Selection ceremony?"

Logically speaking, there was no meaning to this question and it was not necessary to ask. Everyone knew of the benefits one could gain through the Heavenly Selection, or else there would have been no reason for the young experts of the demi-human tribes to so quickly rush to White Emperor City.

But since it was Xuanyuan Po, this question had a deep significance, with an answer that everyone wanted to know.

Because if the rumor was true, Xuanyuan Po was not only a student of the Orthodox Academy, but also Princess Luoluo's student.

"Do you also intend to marry Her Highness?"

The high official stared into Xuanyuan Po's eyes and thundered, his voice filled with rage and disgust. "Do not forget that though there are no official records, everyone knows that you acknowledged Her Highness as teacher in the Orthodox Academy!"

For a teacher and student to ultimately become companions was not unheard of on the continent, but it was nothing worth

celebrating.

And for the student to think this way was especially improper.

Xuanyuan Po replied, "To become Her Highness's student is my greatest honor. Whether or not Her Highness is willing to admit it, I will always be her student."

The high official was even more incensed, coldly rebuking, "Then why are you still participating in the Heavenly Selection! Do you want to humiliate Her Highness?"

Xuanyuan Po answered, "I've never thought about marrying Her Highness, so how is this a humiliation?"

The high official asked, "This being the case, why did you come here?"

Xuanyuan Po pondered this question and answered, "I came to make trouble."

His expression was sincere, his tone firm.

He was like a muddy monkey that had just clambered out of a rice paddy, a mischievous brat that had jumped down from a tree into a lake, but he spoke like an old scholar.

The high official didn't dare believe his ears. "What do you want to do?"

Xuanyuan Po explained, "By making trouble, what I want to do is make it impossible for the Heavenly Selection ceremony to smoothly proceed."

The official vaguely understood what he was getting at. "You do not want Her Highness to be married off?"

"Correct." Xuanyuan Po turned to look at the distant Xiaode, Second Prince, and the other candidates, and then he looked even higher to the Imperial City. He resolutely declared, "No one should think about marrying Her Highness, because I will not let you win."

It was very quiet in front of the Imperial City and his voice was bright and clear, allowing it to spread very far.

The high official sneered, "The Heavenly Selection is the ancestral spirits choosing a groom for Her Highness. What right do you have to stop it?"

Xuanyuan Po replied, "No one can decide Her Highness's marriage, not even the Wildfire of the Celestial Trees or the ancestral spirits."

His surroundings fell into an uproar at these words.

The official's body trembled all over as he harshly shouted, "You dare to blaspheme the Celestial Trees and disrespect the ancestral spirits!"

"If it truly were the Wildfire of the Celestial Trees and the ancestral spirits choosing, the Heavenly Selection would not operate under the current procedure and we would not proceed to the baptism of the Wildfire in the second phase. The so-called Heavenly Selection is still a self-choice. Her Highness's marriage can only be decided by Her Highness."

Xuanyuan Po gazed up at the Imperial City and said, "I know that Her Highness would not be willing to marry an outsider."

No matter how furious the high official or how high and intimidating the palace hall was, he remained composed, calm, perhaps even somewhat dull-witted. His voice was the same, yet it carried a very peculiar persuasive power.

Countless cheers rose from around the Imperial City.

These voices came from the ordinary demi-human subjects, not distinguishing between upper city, middle city, or lower city.

Xuanyuan Po had given voice to the words in their minds.

It was rumored that the Empress persisted with marrying Princess Luoluo to the nephew of her parents' clan, and it was only

the fierce opposition of the Council of Elders that forced her to hold the Heavenly Selection ceremony. Even then, the Empress had not changed her mind.

As one could see, the Great Western Continent's Second Prince was standing nearby, in front of the Imperial City.

How could Princess Luoluo be married to an outsider? What right did he have to become the next White Emperor?

This was the opinion held by the vast majority of demi-humans, but the majesty of the Empress's several centuries of reign made it so that they dared not speak.

Xuanyuan Po's words had been a great delight.

"Those who have participated in the Heavenly Selection and passed through layer after layer of selections to ultimately stand here are all true experts, just like you."

A clear voice of august majesty resounded from the highest point of the Imperial City, cleaving through the clouds to reach the ground.

With the White Emperor in secluded cultivation, there was only one such voice in all of the Demi-human race.

The Imperial City was instantly silenced.

Many demi-humans prostrated on the floor.

"How can you know whether Luoluo is willing to marry one of these people?"

This question caused many of the demi-humans to be a little confused. Whether it was the Heavenly Selection or the trial of the ancestral spirits, the Second Prince of the Great Western Continent, as an outsider, was not able to gain a single advantage. Could the rumor be false? Had the populace mistakenly blamed the Empress?

Yes, the entire continent knew that Princess Luoluo was the

Empress's only daughter and had always been dearly beloved. How could the Empress treat her ill? She presumably only wanted to seek the best marriage for the princess.

Thinking of this, the crowd viewed Xuanyuan Po somewhat differently.

'This being the case, you shouldn't be making trouble anymore.'

Xuanyuan Po looked up at the Imperial City and said, "Her Highness does not like any of these people."

Madam Mu's voice coldly asked, "And how do you know?"

This was a very difficult question to answer.

Madam Mu was Luoluo's mother. If even she didn't know, how could Xuanyuan Po? Was there really something between him and the princess?

Countless gazes once more descended on Xuanyuan Po.

While many people wanted him to give the answer, many more people and the important personages hoped that he would not say a word.

Xuanyuan Po had no idea what any of them was thinking, and he himself did not even think before giving the answer.

"Of course I know. Everyone in the Orthodox Academy knows."

He earnestly said, "Her Highness loves Principal, so how can she be willing to be married off to anyone else?"

1. This chapter title and the next three chapters involve the names of several characters, even if the events of the chapter do not involve the characters in question. I will be translating those titles based on what they refer to in the chapter, but the names of the characters being referenced will be listed here. 958: Xuanyuan Po; 959: Bie Yanghong; 960: Bai Cai; 961: Qiushan Yuanxin, who is Qiushan Jun's father and also the Qiushan clan head.

Chapter 959 – Different Kinds, of Red

The Imperial City once more fell into absolute silence.

The principal that Xuanyuan Po mentioned was naturally the Principal of the Orthodox Academy, the current Pope, Chen Changsheng.

Princess Luoluo loved Chen Changsheng?

In terms of status and age, Chen Changsheng was definitely the best choice. The problem was...

Everyone in the continent knew that Princess Luoluo was Chen Changsheng's student, and Chen Changsheng already had a Daoist companion: the Holy Maiden of the south, Xu Yourong.

What did Xuanyuan Po mean with these words?

The Great Zhou's ambassador slightly arched his brow in displeasure.

The Archbishop of the Western Wastes appeared slightly startled but chose to remain silent.

The Tang clan stewards also suppressed their emotions and maintained their silence.

The Imperial City's observation platform was also quiet, the influential figures within the stone hall glancing at each other, clueless as to how to react.

Was what Xuanyuan Po said true? Had Princess Luoluo secretly been in love with her teacher all this time? How... could this be allowed?

On the highest point of the Imperial City, Madam Mu said no more, but her expression was nasty.

Other than the earliest members of the Orthodox Academy, there were few that could guess at Luoluo's true thoughts, but as her mother, she had naturally figured it out long ago.

What she had not expected was Xuanyuan Po exposing this matter in front of so many people.

It had to be known that this matter would have a ruinous effect on both Chen Changsheng's and Luoluo's reputations.

Why had Xuanyuan Po done this? Was he really an idiot, or just bad?

In the other stone hall, Luoluo had also found out what Xuanyuan Po had said.

She recalled the words her mother had said to her before leaving this morning.

Even if she could deceive the entire world, how could she deceive herself?

She had always guarded that affection well, not letting anyone see it, not even Chen Changsheng.

She had originally planned to continue this way, clueless to the fact that those fellows in the Orthodox Academy had figured it out ages ago.

Now, the entire world knew.

What should she do? This was truly too shameful.

She couldn't help but mentally grumble at Xuanyuan Po.

Was it because of the gradually deepening twilight?

Her little face was a little red.

For some reason, she wasn't angry. On the contrary, she was just a tiny bit happy.

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Silence was because of excessive shock that put the crowd at a loss.

Everyone who had heard Xuanyuan Po's words felt somewhat panicked and disbelieving.

Silence also signified that the atmosphere was growing tense.

"Impudent! You dare disrespect Her Highness by saying such nonsensical words!"

The high official stared at Xuanyuan Po, so angry that his entire body was trembling. Pointing at his face, he shouted, "Somebody come!"

He did not finish speaking, nor did the Red River Beast Guard charge over and cut off Xuanyuan Po's troublesome tongue, because somebody spoke.

This was a very low voice, like the ringing of some ancient bell. It resounded in front of the Imperial City like the echoes amongst a gurgling stream in a secluded valley.

This was not Madam Mu's voice, but the voice of another powerful figure of the Demi-human race.

Within the stone hall behind the observation platform, the Chief Elder slowly opened his eyes, no longer feigning sleep. He slowly stood up and walked out of the hall to the walls of the Imperial City.

His mountainous body cast a shadow far below, shrouding the heads of many people.

The Chief Elder had no opinion on Xuanyuan Po's last words, treating them as if they did not exist.

Whether it was out of consideration for the dignity of the Demi-human race or the complicated relationship with the Human race, this was perhaps the best response.

"What you said just now was correct. The so-called Heavenly Selection ultimately depends on the self. I hope that you can obtain the blessing of the ancestral spirits tomorrow and walk to the end

the day after that."

All of White Emperor City heard the Chief Elder's low and leisurely voice.

This was his stance to Xuanyuan Po, clear and explicit. This was also perhaps his stance to the Human race.

No more trouble was made. The high official and the Red River Beast Guard prepared to seize Xuanyuan Po retreated.

Madam Mu stood at the highest point of the Imperial City, silently gazing to the distant mountains, her thoughts inscrutable.

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Just like they had come, the impoverished crowd from the lower city left the Imperial City like a tide, drowning the Stairway to Heaven and then gradually dispersing into the slums, silently sinking back into their daily toil. It was hard to say whether they would remember today's excitement in the months and years to follow.

Before dispersing, this tide of people first returned Xuanyuan Po to the Pine Paths.

Tonight, the Pine Paths was particularly lively, but not noisy.

The priests from the Daoist Church of the Western Wastes calmly but vigilantly stood on the highest street, keeping watch on the surroundings.

The Tang clan's stewards led several dozen cultivators from the south, using their incisive gazes to keep watch on all places illuminated by lantern light.

A few burly men, bursting with strength, were positioned on the perimeter, inspecting everyone who wanted to enter the Pine Paths.

In every aspect, the factions of the Human race exhibiting so

many forces in the capital of the Demi-human race could easily cause an incident. It was extremely disrespectful to the Demi-human Court.

Madam Mu had moved too quickly, with only a few days passing from the spreading of the rumor to the formal opening of the Heavenly Selection ceremony. The Human race had simply been powerless to form a response.

Xuanyuan Po, as a representative of the Orthodox Academy, naturally became humanity's greatest, perhaps only, hope in White Emperor City.

In order to ensure Xuanyuan Po's safety, the archbishop and the others simply did not care about what the demi-humans thought. Moreover, they were now clearly displaying their distrust towards the Demi-human race.

The archbishop gave Xuanyuan Po a passionate gaze while the Tang clan stewards looked at him with hope.

Xuanyuan Po knew what they were thinking.

In the thinking of the archbishop and the others, Xuanyuan Po's concealing himself for many years and abruptly appearing today had assuredly been on order of the Li Palace.

"Does His Holiness the Pope know of this matter?"

The archbishop nervously asked Xuanyuan Po, "Or is his esteemed self already here?"

Xuanyuan Po shook his head. "Principal probably does not know of this matter."

Seeing his expression, the archbishop and the others knew that he was not lying, causing them to all fall quiet.

The events of the closing of South Stream Temple had been transmitted to White Emperor City the day before yesterday.

The archbishop was also confident that if the Li Palace knew of

this matter, it would pay everything to break Madam Mu's plans.

He had done the same. At the very start, he had torn apart his invitation to the banquet to express the fiercest stance.

But if the Pope still did not know of this matter, the Li Palace would be too late. With just Xuanyuan Po and him, what could they do?

The archbishop recalled Xuanyuan Po's words and felt an intense fear and unease.

If Princess Luoluo and the Pope really did have something between them, then in the aftermath, might not the Pope use sacred flames to burn him to death out of rage?

In this moment of agitation, his face reddened as if he had drunk very strong alcohol.

"Please."

He looked at Xuanyuan Po with a tragic expression and said, "Even if millions have to die, you cannot let Her Highness marry the Great Western Continent's Second Prince!"

Chapter 960 – White, Vegetables

Although contending against millions, I will press forward.¹

Xuanyuan Po thought that he could try such a thing out.

But what if things really did turn out as the archbishop said, with millions of people dying? Xuanyuan Po became somewhat doubtful of the idea. Moreover, with his understanding of Princess Luoluo, if the princess knew that such a massive price needed to be paid, she would probably prepare her dowry overnight and then marry herself off on the morning of the next day.

The archbishop went on his tiptoes to pat Xuanyuan Po on the shoulder, gave him a meaningful glance, then departed with the Tang clan's stewards.

At the mouth of the alley, the Bear tribe leader, who had been waiting for a very long time, gave Xuanyuan Po a profound gaze, then patted him on the shoulder.

He did not need to stand on tiptoes, as he had an even larger physique than Xuanyuan Po.

"The ambassador of the Great Zhou went to the Imperial City, but not to here, signifying that the Imperial Court does not care if Her Highness marries that second prince of the Great Western Continent."

The Bear tribe leader asked, "Just what does His Holiness the Pope think?"

Xuanyuan Po answered, "He probably does not know of this matter."

The Bear tribe leader asked, "Today was of your own volition?"

Xuanyuan Po grunted.

The Bear tribe leader sighed and said, "When I wanted you to return to the tribe, you weren't willing. You insisted on remaining

in White Emperor City, so there was nothing I could do."

Xuanyuan Po very seriously declared, "In the future, I will make an effort for the tribe."

"Talk of the future can be saved for later. What I want to say now is that you already won in the Pine Paths, so why did you go to the two other fighting platforms? This already breaks the rules of the Heavenly Selection ceremony."

The Bear tribe leader gestured two numbers, then went on, "If not for these two protecting you, the Empress would have been fully capable of stopping you from entering the Celestial Tree tomorrow."

Seeing the tribe leader's hand, Xuanyuan Po was rather astonished. Just why did two influential figures like the Xiang clan leader and the Shi clan leader speak up for me?

He said, "I wasn't thinking about that much, nor was I deliberately breaking the rules. It's just that whenever I thought about someone who had ambitions on Her Highness, I wanted to knock them down."

The Bear tribe leader recalled Xuanyuan Po's words in front of the Imperial City and couldn't help but arch his brows. "You're quite bold, but do you think you can defeat Xiaode?"

Xuanyuan Po earnestly considered this, obtaining a most certain conclusion: "I can't."

The Bear tribe leader's thick brows which had just risen dropped back down as he sighed, "Then what meaning do your words have?"

Xuanyuan Po said, "I want to try, to at least persist until the end."

The Bear tribe leader understood what he meant. By persisting to the end, all he meant was delaying for time.

If he could delay for another day, the probability of the

Orthodoxy responding would be a little greater, even though such hopes seemed rather insignificant right now.

White Emperor City was separated from the human capital by eighty thousand li of mountains and rivers, and the seal from the battle between the Divine the day before yesterday had severed any connection between the two sides.

The Bear tribe leader thought for a while, then suddenly said, "Xiaode is not guaranteed to persist until the end."

Xuanyuan Po was startled at these words, confused as to their meaning.

"You've participated in the Heavenly Selection ceremony wholeheartedly thinking of Her Highness's marriage."

The Bear tribe leader stared into his eyes and warned, "But do not forget, their goal is to become the next White Emperor."

Xuanyuan Po was even more confused. Wasn't it the case that if one won the Heavenly Selection and married Princess Luoluo, they would become the next White Emperor?

The Bear tribe leader left, leaving his words unexplained. However, he did leave behind a very sincere statement.

"Your current capability that lets you have these priests and Tang clan stewards protect you truly is because of the Orthodox Academy, but do not forget that it was the tribe that first sent you to the capital. Even if you insist on fighting on behalf of the Orthodox Academy, don't let your butt sit too askew. You should also consider the benefits to the tribe in your actions."

Xuanyuan Po did not retort, remaining silent. He knew that these words were very reasonable. If he had not been selected and nurtured by the tribe, he would not have had the chance to go to the capital, much less meet Chen Changsheng and Luoluo to eventually become the Orthodox Academy's third student.

As he watched the Bear tribe leader's stalwart body gradually

vanish into the darkness, Xuanyuan Po suddenly thought of Tang Thirty-Six.

If Tang Thirty-Six had heard those words, he would definitely have teased, "Your butt is so big, one stool wouldn't be enough."

Yes, why trouble himself over which side his butt should sit on? Why not just sit on two stools at the same time?

Xuanyuan Po instantly felt much lighter, and he turned and walked into the depths of the alley.

The soldiers of the Bear tribe guarded the perimeter, the Tang clan experts and several cultivators from the south occupied the high ground, and the priests of the Daoist Church of the Western Wastes stood guard outside the alley.

The small alley itself was very quiet, without a single sound.

The nearby temple to the Celestial Tree was abnormally quiet in the darkness, and he could faintly smell the odor of lantern oil.

In the deepest part of the alley was the small courtyard that Xuanyuan Po had lived in for several years.

He opened the gate and walked in. He crossed the yard of white stones and took off his shoes. After washing his feet in clean water, he stood on the wooden floorboards.

He glanced at the short pine against the white walls as he took in a deep breath to calm his mind, then walked into the room.

Though the small courtyard seemed quiet, it actually concealed many people. Besides those ordered to protect him, there were also many people watching him with cold gazes.

Those gazes came from various tribes, from the Council of Elders, from the Great Western Continent, and, of course, most of them came from the Demi-human Court.

If someone discovered that the two Divine Domain experts wanted by the court were living in this small courtyard...

Xuanyuan Po was sure that these tribal soldiers, priests, or cultivators would be able to prevent this courtyard from being crushed flat.

Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi's wounds seemed to be... a bit better?

Xuanyuan Po did not understand the medical arts, so he could not be sure.

After losing her arm, Wuqiong Bi had lost a great deal of blood. Her face was still pale, but she had completely devoured the steamed buns from this morning.

Bie Yanghong was still sitting where he was last night, an easygoing expression on his face.

Xuanyuan Po noticed that the hue of the crystals on the floor had grown much fainter and the wooden pagodas had apparently moved.

"Is... Sir still okay?"

In the rather dim light of the room, he found it impossible to make out whether that aura of death on Bie Yanghong's face had vanished or not.

Bie Yanghong gently replied, "It's a little better, but I'm a little hungry."

Xuanyuan Po woke from his stupor and hurriedly turned to go and make dinner.

As he pushed at the paper door, he paused. Turning around, he bowed to Bie Yanghong and earnestly said, "Thank you, Sir."

He was thanking Bie Yanghong for their conversation this morning.

To any cultivator, the fighting experience of a supreme expert of the continent was a most precious harvest.

After leaving the room, he took out a few pieces of firewood from

the pile to start a fire and begin cooking.

He had not kept many winter vegetables in the house, so he only made two simple vegetable dishes and a stew of dried meat and potatoes.

Bie Yanghong took the food and voiced his thanks.

Wuqiong Bi still had a nasty complexion, but she ultimately resisted the urge to say anything unpleasant, only grunting twice.

1.This is a quote from the 'Mencius', a collection of anecdotes from the famous Chinese philosopher Mencius.

Chapter 961 – The Autumn Mountains, the Source of Trust

Bie Yanghong noticed that Xuanyuan Po was not holding chopsticks, so he worriedly asked, "Are you not eating?"

He knew that Xuanyuan Po had taken part in the Heavenly Selection ceremony today, but he had not asked about it. He knew the result just from looking at Xuanyuan Po's expression.

He was more concerned about the fact that Xuanyuan Po would be going to the Celestial Trees tomorrow to receive the baptism of the Wildfire. How could he be allowed to not eat his fill tonight?

"I have something to eat."

Xuanyuan Po took out a paper bag from his bosom. Taking the leftover meat bun from within, he ate it with half a bowl of vegetable soup.

Wuqiong Bi froze at this sight, then ignored him, lowering her head to eat.

After a while, she raised her head to take a glance and realized that Bie Yanghong had been watching the bun in Xuanyuan Po's hands the entire time. She couldn't help but furrow her brow.

The bun was cold and hard, the juices congealed into white fat. It should have been very unpleasant to eat, so why was her husband so fixated on it?

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The sky was dark, the Pine Paths shrouded in the deepest darkness, but Xuanyuan Po was already awake.

He walked out of the alley, indicated to the alarmed priests that everything was fine, then went to the nearby street to buy a bag of

meat buns, half a pot of porridge, two bowls of corn paste, one bowl of dry noodles, two fried sticky rice cakes, one tray of steamed buns, and three kinds of pickled vegetables. This in tow, he returned to the small courtyard.

He was still eating meat buns, while the rest was meant for Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi to eat throughout the day.

Under Bie Yanghong's profound gaze and Wuqiong Bi's angry one, Xuanyuan Po silently ate six meat buns. After cleaning himself up, tidying his clothes, and solemnly bowing to Bie Yanghong, he took the Mountain Sea Sword from the wood pile and left the small courtyard once more.

Unlike yesterday, he attracted many more gazes today.

Several dozen priests from the Daoist Church of the Western Wastes and a hundred-some warriors of the Bear tribe escorted him to Jade Jing Ferry.

Xuanyuan Po noticed that the Tang clan steward and several southern cultivators were following from a close distance.

He had met these cultivators last night. According to the steward's introduction, one of them was from Gentle Stream Monastery, apparently Ye Xiaolian's martial uncle from when she was still in the outer sect.

The morning fog cloaked White Emperor City, just like it had on every other unremarkable day over the countless years. Jade Jing Ferry was also as lively as usual, though the best-positioned pier was no longer occupied by hardworking farmers, but by officials of the Demi-human Court and powerful personages like the Bear tribe leader.

The morning sun was completely shut out by the mountains on the opposite shore. This, coupled with the thick fog, made it seem like it was still night.

When they boarded the ferry, the Red River suddenly surged

with waves. The ferry lightly swayed, and then a low and terrifying roar rose up.

Visitors who heard these roars and felt the furious waves of the Red River might tremble in fear, but everyone present had lived in White Emperor City for quite some time. They knew that these were all signs that the Jings had awoken and were currently eating. They were completely unconcerned, and after several boxes of the plumpest barracudas were dumped in the river, the roars quickly subsided.

The morning fog gradually dispersed and it was already possible to see the surrounding river, smooth and placid.

The mountains on the opposite shore were still shrouded in fog. Even though the sun was about to rise over the ridgeline, only the silhouettes of those nine massive Celestial Trees could be seen.

The bow of the ferry cleaved through the waters, accompanied by the splashing of the waves and the rising of the sun. By the time the ferry reached the other shore, the morning sun was already sending out its warm rays of light, the mists completely expelled.

Before their eyes were the green mountains that extended unbroken for countless li, like countless layers of walls.

The nine Celestial Trees within the mountain walls appeared like giant torches in the morning light, exuding the invisible Wildfire that inspired both reverence and delight in the Demi-human race.

The Celestial Trees were so massive that only the mightiest of peaks could bear their weight. They were also very far, the closest one several dozen li away.

There were nine paths to the Celestial Trees, but they all began from one point: the high platform across the river from Jade Jing Ferry.

Madam Mu stood on this platform.

The morning light bestowed dazzling clarity on her body, making

it seem particularly lofty and tall.

The morning wind blew, causing her gorgeous long gown to rustle, imbuing it with great majesty.

The Tianhai Divine Empress and Pope Yin had already returned to the sea of stars, the Holy Maiden of the south had gone with Su Li to the Sacred Light Continent, and the White Emperor was cultivating and recovering from his wounds.

Of the Five Saints, the only one that would still appear before the world was her.

Below her, the demi-human elders stood in one row while the ministers and generals of the court stood in another.

Only truly influential figures and their attendants had the right to be present today. The atmosphere was dignified, so quiet that no sound could be heard.

With a burst of ritual music, everyone bowed.

An official stepped forward and began to read a ceremonial address.

Once this oration was finished, the ceremonial offerings were sent up in a steady flow, everything proceeding smoothly.

Xuanyuan Po and the five others¹ walked up the stone steps to the high platform.

Countless gazes fell on their backs, upon which countless thoughts emerged.

Who could pass the baptism of the Wildfire, pass the trial of the ancestral spirits?

And who would become the final victor tomorrow and marry Princess Luoluo?

Xiaode had the strongest cultivation and the purest blood, so there was logically no one that could defeat him. But it was evident that the Empress favored the Second Prince of the Great Western

Continent, and there was a chance that the White Emperor did as well. What other reason could there be for the Chief Elder's silence after that night?

And there was also the abrupt appearance of Xuanyuan Po. He was clearly a descendant of the Bear tribe, but he chose to fight for the Orthodox Academy. This was an incredibly deep backing, but seeing as how the Human race had no time to respond, he had probably come on his own. What results could he achieve with just himself?

The other two demi-human experts were equally famous, so it would probably not be difficult for them to pass the trial of the ancestral spirits. If Xiaode was a little careless, there was a chance that he might lose to them, but why did that young man in the bamboo hat not even glance at them, appearing so arrogant and aloof?

In terms of surprises in the Heavenly Selection ceremony, other than Xuanyuan Po's sudden emergence, there was also the young man in the bamboo hat.

Xiaode, the Second Prince of the Great Western Continent, and the two demi-human experts all had very clear backgrounds, and even Xuanyuan Po had nothing left to hide. But even now, no one knew who the young man in the bamboo hat was, where he came from, or what he wanted to do.

This should have been absolutely impossible.

The spies of the court and the various tribes had secretly investigated, but some sort of power within White Emperor City was cutting off the young man from all sights, stealthily yet unflinchingly severing all prying gazes.

To be able to prevent the powerful personages in the court and the tribes from finding out this person's background while also not showing itself, this strength was truly too terrifying.

Many tribes quickly halted their investigations out of fear, and even the spies of the court withdrew upon learning of the young man's residence.

The young man lived in a courtyard extremely close to the Xiang clan's estate.

This easily led to a certain conclusion.

It was not completely unexpected. The young man might not be a demi-human, might even be the foe of the Demi-human race. But even if this was true, it did not matter.

This was because the young man in the bamboo hat would enter the Celestial Tree today, receiving the baptism of the Wildfire, the trial of the ancestral spirit.

If this person truly meant ill towards the Demi-human race, was a spy from the Human or even Demon race, he would be burned to nothing in both body and soul by the Wildfire.

This was the heart of the Heavenly Selection ceremony.

Only those creatures that swore loyalty to the White Emperor clan could endure the baptism of the Wildfire and the trial of the ancestral spirits.

The expert that made it through this pass would voluntarily leave their original tribe to become a member of the White Emperor clan.

That the demi-human elders, ministers and generals would ultimately agree to Madam Mu's plan was based on this point.

Countless gazes fell on the Great Western Continent's Second Prince, solemn, or cold, or suspicious, or malicious.

The events at South Stream Temple had been spread across White Emperor City last night.

The Great Western Continent's Imperial clan really did have such great schemes.

Was the Second Prince really willing to remold his body and soul to become one of the Demi-human race?

If he really did do this, he had a chance of becoming the next White Emperor.

Under the attentive gaze of the crowd, the Great Western Continent's Second Prince turned around to face the elders, ministers and generals.

The morning light shone on his handsome face, but it could not illuminate his true feelings.

It seemed like regret, but also relief. Ultimately, it all became tranquility.

He declared, "I withdraw."

1. Yes, for some reason, seven has become six. One was apparently lost overnight.

Chapter 962 – Burning the Heart with Fire

(I)

The statement of the Great Western Continent's Second Prince instantly silenced the area around the high platform, then plunged it into an uproar.

Xiaode gazed at the Second Prince, his eyes cold. The other two demi-human experts glanced at each other with shock visible on their faces.

Xuanyuan Po's mouth was wide open as he found himself utterly speechless.

The young man in the bamboo hat continued to calmly stand with his head slightly lowered, concealed in the shadows.

Both the rumors and the events that followed indicated that the Empress was intent on marrying Princess Luoluo to the Second Prince of the Great Western Continent.

In the eyes of the Daoist church and the ambassador who Xuanyuan Po represented, the Second Prince was the one they needed to be most wary of.

But he was now declaring his withdrawal from the Heavenly Selection ceremony?

Just what was going on here? Was the rumor false? Were the events that followed also faked?

Why had the Empress held the Heavenly Selection ceremony then? What was she really planning? Just who did she actually want to marry Princess Luoluo to?

Xiaode, or those two other demi-human experts with deep backing?

Or was she intending to marry Princess Luoluo to the person that Xuanyuan Po represented... the Pope?

Countless gazes traveled between Madam Mu and the Great Western Continent's Second Prince.

The demi-human elders, ministers, and generals dearly wished to know what sort of trick this aunt and nephew were playing, and also what sort of explanation the Second Prince would have.

"Correct. I came with the diplomatic mission to White Emperor City with the intent of marrying my cousin, because I like her."

The Second Prince paused for a while, a bitter smile appearing on his face as he continued, "But since Cousin has already found her true love, why should I interfere in the middle? I have no desire for her to hold a grudge against me over this matter."

Many people turned to look at Xuanyuan Po.

Luoluo was the Second Prince's cousin, and the true love he spoke of was naturally a response to Xuanyuan Po's words from yesterday.

Before yesterday, few people knew of the fact that Luoluo loved her teacher, nor would they believe it if told. But once Xuanyuan Po said those words, many people suddenly felt that there was a high chance of this matter being true.

Regardless of whether the Great Western Continent's Second Prince was speaking the truth, this was the excuse he had used to withdraw from the Heavenly Selection and it was hard for anyone to object. Moreover, the reason he gave for withdrawing added even more fuel to the conflagration started by Xuanyuan Po's words, leaving Luoluo and Chen Changsheng to endure an even greater pressure.

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Madam Mu did not give much of a reaction.

The withdrawal of the Second Prince of the Great Western

Continent had been part of her plan in the first place.

This final statement of his that came from the depths of his heart, though not part of her plan, had already obtained her tacit approval.

She was currently more concerned with another matter, or, to put it more accurately, she was only concerned about this one thing.

As the sun gradually brightened, no one noticed her give a seemingly unintentional, but actually extremely profound glance towards a certain spot.

The young man in the bamboo hat stood in this spot.

Madam Mu had known who this young man was from the very start.

Whenever she thought about how he dared to leave Xuelao City alone, even she could not help but be deeply shocked.

This had been one of Black Robe's conditions.

Although she had agreed, she did not believe the matter would be this simple.

Logically speaking, it was absolutely impossible for the young man to pass the trial of the ancestral spirits, dooming him to a most tragic end.

Of course, any other young expert really might have taken such large risks to pass the trial and marry Luoluo. It was quite likely that they would receive the baptism of the Wildfire, remolding their body and soul to become a true demi-human.

Anyone would want to be the next White Emperor. This was one of the world's greatest temptations, one that not even Xiaode, an expert of the Proclamation of Liberation, could resist. The problem with this was that given the young man's identity, he absolutely could not become the next White Emperor, nor would he be

willing to.

If one had to list the people on the continent that could disregard the temptation, the young man and the young Emperor of the Great Zhou would occupy the top two spots.

So why had Black Robe proposed this condition? Why had the young man participated in the Heavenly Selection, and why was he willing to enter the Celestial Tree and receive the baptism of the Wildfire? If it was just for allying with the Demi-human race to resist the ever-strengthening Human race, there were still many other methods.

The Xiang clan leader had not looked at the young man in the bamboo hat, but his attention had always been on him.

What confused Madam Mu also confused him. In addition, he did not know the contents of the treaty, so he was even more concerned.

He asked, "Is there any chance of an accident?"

Madam Mu replied, "Black Robe has always taken every possibility into account. Nothing should happen."

She paused, then said with an indifferent expression, "And if something happens to him here, that will also be fine by me."

The Xiang clan leader understood her meaning. He silently thought for a while, then said, "The Mountain-Cleaving Army reached the northern approach of Cong Province last night."

The Mountain-Cleaving Army was the Demi-human race's strongest army. For tens of thousands of years, it had been stationed in the frigid north, keeping watch on the demons.

Madam Mu said, "Chief Elder's plans will naturally go smoothly."

The Xiang clan leader finally could not help but shoot a glance at the young man in the bamboo hat.

If this young man died in the baptism of the Wildfire within the

Celestial Tree, then... the most powerful army of the Demi-human race, the Mountain-Cleaving Army, would immediately notify the Great Zhou's Cong Province Army, and then in the north... the war would begin.

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The Great Western Continent's Second Prince withdrew from the Heavenly Selection.

The final five left the high platform, following different paths to different mountains.

On the peaks of these five tall mountains grew five massive trees. These trees grew to unfathomable heights, thrusting into the sea of clouds so that their highest branches could not be seen. It was similarly impossible to imagine just how many li beneath the ground these colossal trees had spread their roots.

The closer one got to these massive trees, the hotter it became. Waves of heat, invisible yet undoubtedly real, emerged from the ground, sweeping across the earth like the stuffy winds of midsummer.

These waves of heat were the Qi of the Celestial Trees. As the rites of the Heavenly Selection ceremony proceeded, the Wildfire within the Celestial Trees had become increasingly vibrant, emanating a surging energy to the world. This was an infinite energy, carrying both a savage nature and an aura of most exuberant vitality.

The young man in the bamboo hat walked up to his Celestial Tree.

At the base of the Celestial Tree was a hollow, its entrance several dozen zhang tall and a hundred-some zhang wide. It was so enormous that it seemed more like a natural cave in a large mountain, able to hold the entire stone hall of White Emperor

City's Imperial Palace.

What made one speechless was that there really was a stone hall within this giant tree hollow.

The young man's gaze traveled from the part of the Celestial Tree that touched the clouds to the stone hall within the hollow. He silently thought for a while, then pushed the front brim of the bamboo hat a little lower. He walked into the tree hollow, his figure quickly vanishing within the stone hall.

Xiaode and the other two demi-human experts entered their respective Celestial Trees.

The last to enter a Celestial Tree was Xuanyuan Po.

His footsteps were somewhat heavy, his movements slow, as his mood was somewhat depressed and uneasy.

As a member of the Demi-human race, he had heard countless legends about the Wildfire of the Celestial Trees and had worshipped the ancestral spirits countless times.

He was worried that the ancestral spirits would see his true intentions.

He was not participating in the Heavenly Selection ceremony to gain the final victory, marry Princess Luoluo, and become the next White Emperor.

He had come to make trouble.

Would the ancestral spirits forgive him for his disrespect?

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As he entered the gloomy stone hall and traversed an incredibly long stone path, Xuanyuan Po felt more and more anxious.

Through his senses, he became very sure that he was walking underground, and that he had already gone very deep.

The stone path was extremely dry, with no sign of moisture, no water or moss. There was only an endless hot wind.

The deeper he went, the more scorching the wind became. As a demi-human, he could also sense that the Qi of the Wildfire was getting stronger and stronger.

The blazing waves of Qi did not slow his steps, as he did not find them painful.

He felt like the Qi within his body was getting wilder and wilder, his true essence growing increasingly lively.

But he was unaware that beneath his clothes, many lines were appearing on his body.

These complicated lines gradually formed a design that spread out from beneath his clothes, ultimately encroaching on his face.

In the faint red flow of the heat waves, the designs on his face seemed alive, beautiful in their strangeness, but also bursting with power.

Soon after, while he was completely unprepared, a bloody hue occupied his pupil while countless iron-like hairs exploded out of his skin. With a clacking sound, his body began to grow larger, seemingly imbued with an endless strength, exuding an aura of madness.

He was undergoing berserk metamorphosis.

Chapter 963 – Burning the Heart with Fire

(II)

The moment Xuanyuan Po underwent berserk metamorphosis, the waves of heat traveling through the stone path suddenly exploded into real flames.

A primordial Qi emerged from the designs on Xuanyuan Po's body, keeping the flames outside.

But these flames were the true form of the Celestial Tree's Wildfire, holding an unimaginable might. It made the true essence and Qi within Xuanyuan Po's body vibrate with the flames, stoking them so hot that they instantly broke through his meridians and Qi openings to surge into his surroundings!

Xuanyuan Po felt a terrible pain, like countless sharp knives were stabbing into his body. His face became incomparably pale while beads of sweat the size of beans dripped down from his forehead.

After a few moments, he could no longer endure. With a low roar, he dropped one knee to the ground.

With a boom, his burly body swayed and his sturdy knee smashed a shallow hole in the ground. The flying shards of stone tore several holes through the blazing Wildfire that were almost instantly filled.

The bizarre and beautiful designs on his body allowed the Celestial Tree's Wildfire to verify that he was a demi-human, so no real harm was done to his body. However, the true essence in his body was circulating at uncontrollable speeds, and he was at risk of death through combustion at any moment.

Xuanyuan Po kneeled in the flames, his eyes closed and his face fraught with pain. His heaving gasps seemed like they would continue forever.

After some time, he finally opened his eyes and looked forward.

The Wildfire in the stone path had already vanished and his eyes had regained their sobriety, still tinged with fear and respect.

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Not long after Xuanyuan Po broke through the baptism of Wildfire, the two other demi-human experts beneath their Celestial Trees also broke through this bottleneck. However, since they had not had their meridians widened with needles by Chen Changsheng in the Orthodox Academy, their circumstances were more dangerous, their appearances more miserable. Their clothes had been scorched into rags and their bodies were covered in blood. They proceeded very unsteadily along the stone path, liable to fall over at any moment.

Xiaode lived up to his reputation as second on the Proclamation of Liberation. The baptism of Wildfire had no effect on him, primarily because he had a higher cultivation level than Xuanyuan Po and the others, but also because he had been lucky enough to experience the baptism of Wildfire many years ago.

The one facing the most danger was the young man in the bamboo hat, because he needed to endure the most pressure.

He was not a demi-human, so his blood did not contain the Qi of the Wildfire left behind by his ancestors. And no matter how much pressure he faced, strange and beautiful designs would not emerge on his body and face to protect him. In other words, he could only rely on his cultivation and strength to endure.

No longer after he traveled underground through the stone hall, the Celestial Tree's Wildfire sensed that he was not a demi-human. No waves of heat came to welcome him, only terrifying flames!

To creatures that were not demi-humans, the Wildfire had no sense of softness or instruction, only callous killing intent.

As he sensed the heat and energy within the flames, sensed the

savage and brutal Qi, the young man raised his head, his expression grave as he gazed at the smear of red that engulfed the stone path.

This was the baptism of the Wildfire.

Demi-human experts could rely on their powerful physiques and determined wills to pass, as their bodies contained the Qi of the Wildfire. Non-demi-humans, on the other hand, if they had no desire to be burned to death by the Wildfire, would have to open their seas of consciousness and allow the Wildfire to remold their souls.

The young man naturally didn't want to die, but he also could not pick the latter, so what would he do?

In a flash, the extremely heat-resistant Polestar Grass growing from the chinks in the stone walls, almost invisible to the eye, burned into several hundred wisps of smoke.

A smoky curtain dropped down from the brim of the bamboo hat to the ground, protecting his body.

The wild and brutal Wildfire of the Celestial Tree descended on his body, but it was blocked by the smoky curtain.

With a low yet ear-piercing biting sound, the curtain grew thinner and thinner, the smoke fainter and fainter. The grave expression on his face grew more and more sincere, but there was no fear, only caution and a hint of curiosity.

If he just stood in the stone path and took on this endless stream of Wildfire, even the divine artifact that was his bamboo hat would eventually be exhausted into trash. Before the bamboo hat lost effectiveness, he had to make it past the Wildfire.

He walked through the path of flames.

The light smoke dropping down from the hat could protect his face and body, but not his feet.

His footsteps were extremely heavy and slow. Each step left a clear imprint on the stone path.

After some time, the Wildfire in the stone path abruptly vanished.

The curtain of smoke dropping down from the brim of the bamboo hat had faded so much that it was almost invisible.

Half of his handsome face was revealed, occasionally flashing with a smear of pain.

To walk through this path laden with the Wildfire of the Celestial Tree, he had suffered some very painful injuries.

But the greatest pain was in his heart.

He had used two divine artifacts preserved in the Demon Palace for many years. Who knew when they might eventually recover?

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The young man in the bamboo hat stood silently in front of a swamp.

He knew that this was not a real swamp.

Though he was several dozen zhang away, he could still feel a choking heat, with even the edge of his clothes beginning to crinkle.

It was too hot here, even hotter than the baptism of Wildfire in the stone path. This place was probably deep underground.

The cavern here was enormous and empty. Countless tree roots of varying thickness hung from its roof.

Those tree roots were spread throughout, boring deeply into the walls of black stone.

These were probably the roots of the Celestial Tree.

Whether it was the black stone walls or the swamp before him,

they were hot to an inconceivable level.

The light emerging from the stone path and some other place diffused before it had time to land.

He could not understand how the roots of the Celestial Tree could live so well.

The entirety of this underground cavern seemed like an illusion.

A rock dropped from the roof of the cavern. After ten-some seconds, it finally landed in the swamp.

A small hole appeared in the surface of the swamp, which seemed to be made of congealed, black oil.

A flame shot out of the hole, looking like a dragon of fire.

The flame struck the roof, transforming into countless embers that set several roots ablaze.

The 'swamp' was actually magma.

The young man raised his head to the roof, his expression shifting as he saw the blazing roots.

The roots were not actually burning.

The flames were actually being extinguished.

They were being swallowed by the roots.

The nutrients the Celestial Trees required came from the magma flowing underground?

Even with his most esteemed status and incredibly broad experiences, he was still somewhat stunned by this sight.

When he thought of the task he was soon to undertake, he couldn't but feel a little nervous. Only after gripping the two chilly objects in his sleeve did he feel a little more at ease.

Chapter 964 – The Ancestral Spirits of the Demi-human Race

Perhaps because of the vibrations underground or because the air in the cavern was moving too quickly, the dense web of roots on the walls and roof of the cave trembled continuously. Each tremble would cause a rock to drop down from the roof, breaking the seemingly solid surface of the swamp. A flame would shoot up and fall on the walls of the cave, where it would be quickly consumed by the roots.

This was an extremely simple and complete process, but it was also somewhat frightening. From a certain perspective, the Celestial Tree was snaring its prey.

The young man in the bamboo hat stood on a spot not far and not close to the swamp. He remained very cautious, not moving in the slightest.

After digesting the shock brought by the roots of the Celestial Tree, he placed his focus on an even deeper area. He noticed that cinnabar fruits about the size of fists were hanging from the roots. Just like the roots of the Celestial Tree, these fruits did not fear the intense heat brought by the magma, so they were probably very precious objects.

Then he heard a hiss from the deepest depths of the swamp, which was immediately followed by a similar sound from the walls and roof of the cavern. It was like an echo, or perhaps a special sound made by a special object in a special environment.

All of this underground cavern was scorching hot, whether it was the roots of the Celestial Tree, the cinnabar fruits hanging from them, or the black stone walls. Although there were no flames, it was easy to imagine that any sort of paper or leaf that fell within would almost instantly be burned into smoke.

And this was not even mentioning the source of the heat: the swamp of magma.

Based on the principle that 'Yang cannot exist alone', this environment of scorching heat should not have been able to persist for long and should have fallen apart on its own shortly after forming.

But the Wildfire of the Celestial Trees had been passed down through the Demi-human race for countless years.

His gaze fell on the black walls, gradually perceiving farther into their depths. Although he could not personally see it, he could sense the existence of a certain object.

The objects were very small in volume, but they were spread very finely around the entire cavern. These fragments were also extremely low in temperature, emanating a nigh unimaginable cold.

The hissing he had heard before was the sound made when these extremely cold fragments clashed against the scorching heat of the magma swamp.

What sort of object would be so cold as to resist the Wildfire of the Celestial Tree?

He quickly came to the answer.

Those fragments were probably crystals formed from the Deep Freeze Dragon Breath of the Black Frost Dragon tribe.

It was said that countless years ago, the Black Frost Dragons had performed an extremely important role in establishing the demi-human country. Even now, the entire Demi-human race still worshipped the Black Frost Dragons as gods. This was presumably the reason.

If the Black Frost Dragon tribe had not so generously, even altruistically, offered so many Deep Freeze Dragon Breath crystals, even if the demi-humans did obtain nine Celestial Tree seeds from

their offering to the starry sky, they would have found it impossible to seal the Wildfire raging in the earth. Thus, the savage world of the ancient era would have never become the beautiful land of the demi-humans in the present.

After some time, the young man finally concluded his observations and took one step towards the swamp.

With just this simple step, the ground began to quake and the surrounding black walls began to twist and deform, flashing with countless bizarre rays of light. The roof of the cave was even more chaotic, the roots of the Celestial Tree seemingly coming to life, writhing and straightening like snakes in the strangest of sights.

The phenomena in this cave were naturally not because of his one step, but because a powerful existence had sensed his arrival.

As the earth quaked, more and more small stones dropped from the roof of the cave to ultimately fall into the blazing hot swamp.

Many holes were instantly punched into the congealed oil of the swamp, and several dozen goutts of flame shot out almost simultaneously.

The roots of the Celestial Tree could not consume all these flames in a short time, so the melting walls began to collapse even faster.

Countless stones fell like a torrential rain into the swamp, causing countless tongues of flame to shoot out.

The entire cavern was filled with pillars of flame that twisted and pierced through each other, a grandiose and beautiful sight.

The surface of the swamp had completely burst open, the searing magma revealing its true and terrifying appearance. It constantly roiled like syrup or blood, garish to the extreme.

This magma was the source of the Celestial Tree's Wildfire, and an unimaginable heat and pressure spread from it.

Although the light smoke dropping down from the bamboo hat

protected him, the young man still began to sweat. In a short time, his clothes were utterly soaked.

He took a handkerchief from his sleeve and wiped the sweat from his brow. He remained very easygoing, seemingly unperturbed.

The terrifying heat unleashed by the roiling magma and the Qi of the Wildfire enveloped the entire cave. The countless pillars of fire seemed like some ancient ceremony.

In the pillars of fire and red light, a picture gradually began to appear, one that was constantly changing.

The young man's expression became abnormally solemn. As he stared at those pictures in the fiery light, he did not even blink, even when his eyes began to ache with a piercing pain.

The first picture was a city, and then a high mountain, and then there was a plateau amidst the mountains.

And then there were countless creatures. Some of them were common, like elephants, lions, tigers and wolves. Others were the stuff of myths, like Dragons and Phoenixes. Soon after came cows and sheep, geese and horses.

The young man stared at these images, a surprised expression on his face. "What sort of star images are these?"

All these pictures finally dispersed into the Wildfire.

The roiling magma split open like the sea, transforming into a flat platform in the shape of a lotus.

An elder dressed in furs, his long hair draped behind him, appeared on the platform.

This elder was clearly not real, but some sort of mental projection.

The underground cavern was huge, several hundred zhang high, but this elder seemed to be tens of thousands of zhang high, encompassing the entire world.

The young man gazed at the old man within the Wildfire, his expression now unprecedentedly grave, his pitch-black eyes in a state of absolute vigilance.

The old man seemed like a real god, because from a certain perspective, he was a god.

He was an ancestral spirit of the Demi-human race.

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Beneath the other Celestial Trees, an ancestral spirit of the Demi-human race also manifested.

Xuanyuan Po felt like his body had become abnormally heavy. Not daring to even think about resistance, he kneeled on the ground.

The other two demi-human experts were even more lacking in energy. They had kneeled much earlier, their bodies trembling as they teetered on the brink of unconsciousness.

Xiaode was in better circumstances, but only barely.

His face was pale, his eyes closed as he silently prayed, hoping to be blessed by the ancestral spirit.

The young man in the bamboo hat did not kneel, only thoughtfully gazed in silence at the ancestral spirit's image.

Suddenly the ancestral spirit opened its eyes.

Beneath the various Celestial Trees, the ancestral spirits opened their eyes.

A ray of light pierced through the boundary between the mental and physical, descending upon the bodies of Xiaode, Xuanyuan Po, and the other two demi-human experts.

The ray of light also fell on the young man in the bamboo hat.

The light made his face abnormally pale, but his eyes were

bloodshot, because he was very excited, even somewhat crazy.

"It really is Sacred Light!"

Chapter 965 – The Anointment of Sacred Light

The light was brimming with the Qi of life, but it also contained a strength that could destroy all things in this world.

This light was not white, nor was it gold. It was a mottled and impure mixture.

What was the Wildfire of the Celestial Tree? It was not the waves of heat within the stone path, not the pillars of flame. This light was the true Wildfire.

Countless years ago, the ancestors of the Demi-human race had obtained the true source of the Wildfire and hidden it underground, deep within the magma. Later on, it was only the truly talented demi-human experts, those blessed with incredible potential, who would be given the chance to travel far below the Celestial Trees and experience the Qi of the Wildfire, using it to comprehend the true essence of strength.

But why had the young man in the bamboo hat said those words?

The Wildfire of the Celestial Tree was Sacred Light?

Sacred Light from where?

The Li Palace?

Holy Maiden Peak?

Or was it from that most distant continent?

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The massive projection of the demi-human ancestral spirit cast itself onto the spiritual worlds of Xiaode, Xuanyuan Po, and the other two demi-humans. The underground caverns raged with flames as they silently kowtowed to that massive figure. They did

not circulate their true essence to protect their bodies or even think of resistance. They allowed the pillar of light from an unknown world to fall upon their bodies.

As long as their loyalty and courage could obtain the approval of the ancestral spirit, the Wildfire would enter their bodies, swiftly modifying and strengthening their bodies. Compared to the improvements offered by the obstructions in the stone paths, this was the true baptism of Wildfire.

The young man did not kneel, did not close his eyes, and he certainly did not pray.

He stood in front of the sea of fire, his hands held behind him as he calmly gazed at the colossal figure of the Demi-human race's ancestral spirit. As he sensed the Wildfire's Qi, he seemed to be thinking of something.

He had taken an enormous risk to leave Xuelao City and come here. Of course, he wanted to express his sincerity towards the alliance with the demi-humans, but that was not the important reason.

He had three things that he needed to do in White Emperor City, and the first was to investigate the secret of the Demi-human race's ancestral spirits and the Wildfire of the Celestial Trees.

Now, the ancestral spirit had appeared and the Wildfire had descended upon him. One of the hypotheses that he and the Military Advisor had made a long time ago had finally obtained proof.

The Celestial Tree's Wildfire really was Sacred Light.

To him, this was an extremely important matter, allowing him to fill a gap in a painting called 'History'.

Madam Mu had probably guessed at his intentions in participating in the Heavenly Selection, that he wanted to personally witness the Wildfire and the ancestral spirit.

Perhaps the White Emperor, cultivating in the distant mountains, knew of this as well.

But these two Saints probably did not care too much.

The demi-humans themselves truthfully did not understand what the Wildfire passed down by their ancestors was.

Whenever he thought of this, the young man could not suppress his scorn and contempt.

The Divine race was the race with the longest history on the continent, and this Divine race was the Demon race, so it was the Demon race that knew the most secrets.

Moreover, when Madam Mu guessed that he wanted to see the Wildfire, she also wanted to see how he would respond to it.

When confronting the unstoppable might of the ancestral spirit and the Wildfire that could destroy all things, even if he was the Demon Lord, what could he do?

He was not a demi-human and certainly had no wish to become a demi-human, so it was naturally impossible for him to obtain the approval of the ancestral spirit of the Demi-human race.

He still needed to rely on his strength to contend against the Wildfire of the Celestial Tree. The problem was that the Wildfire was countless times stronger than the waves of heat in the stone path, and those two divine artifacts of the Demon race were already severely damaged and impossible to use again. What method would he use to endure?

The pressure exuded by the ancestral spirit grew stronger and stronger, its figure taller and taller. Through some incomprehensible method, it exceeded the several-hundred-zhang height of the cavern, extending into some black void where it looked down upon him like he was an ant.

In both the black void and the real world, the searing Wildfire raged, brimming with an energy that could destroy all things.

His face grew paler and paler as he sweat more and more, but before this sweat could soak his clothes, it was steamed dry.

His delicate features would occasionally be tinged with pain, through which one could imagine the torment he was currently enduring.

But no fear could be seen on his face or in his black eyes, not even the slightest hint of panic.

When the ancestral spirit's body had grown so massive that it seemed about to break through the starry sky...

When the Wildfire in the cavern had grown so fierce that even the roots of the Celestial Tree began to burn...

When the curtain of light smoke dropping from the bamboo hat finally burned to nothing and its brim began to burst with sparks...

He took out two small stone statues.

It was difficult to say what sort of stone these statues were carved from, something akin to gold or jade, but they also seemed incomparably smooth and glossy.

The two statues depicted two naked people. One stood straight and apathetic while the other had its hand on its knee, like it was thinking. Although very small, they were detailed down to the smallest hair, appearing almost lifelike.

If Bie Yanghong or Madam Mu were present, they would naturally recognize the origins of these two statues.

These were the Angels from the Sacred Light Continent.

Black Robe had used some type of method to make them into statues.

Those two statues had been quietly standing in the back gate of the courtyard in the western part of White Emperor City this entire time.

Then they had been brought by the young man to this place.

He gripped the two Angel statues and thrust them towards the Wildfire.

The Wildfire that blazed to the heavens seemed to sense something. After freezing for a second, it grew even more savage and fierce, howling as it raged towards the statues.

The blazing hot Wildfire, carrying a Qi that could destroy all, touched the two statues and was instantly swallowed.

The two Angel statues appeared practically unchanged. They were just a little brighter, though still as cold as two black holes.

The young man gazed at the statues in his hand, his expression growing stern. Even his breathing seemed to have stopped.

The Wildfire continued to pour into the two Angel statues, accompanied by terrifying howls that echoed through the cavern.

As time passed, the two statues grew brighter and brighter.

At some point, the demi-human ancestral spirit had dispersed.

After some time, the Wildfire in the cavern was finally sucked clean by the two Angel statues and the temperature gradually returned to normal. The surface of the magma gradually solidified, regaining its black hue. The roots of the Celestial Tree, however, had been scorched into an unbearable state. It had probably not received such damage in all its countless years of existence.

The two statues gradually dimmed, regaining their original appearance. And yet, compared to before, they seemed to have undergone some subtle transformation.

The lines on the statues seemed clearer, the impassive faces of the Angels more vivid. One could even believe that their lashes were blinking.

Like they would come to life at any moment.

The young man gazed at the two stone statues, many emotions flashing through his black eyes.

There was wariness and fear, derision and sadness. It was an incredibly complex mixture of emotions, but they eventually transformed into a tinge of confusion.

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The first to conclude his baptism of Wildfire was Xiaode, followed by Xuanyuan Po. The two other demi-human experts had still not returned to the high platform.

Suddenly, dark clouds gathered over the mountains, thunder and lightning lashing out as a torrential downpour descended.

Mist suddenly drowned out the mountains, the strange sight of rain being evaporated by the Wildfire.

Xiaode abruptly turned to a mountain to the northeast.

The moment he turned, so did the Xiang clan leader and many generals and ministers.

The mists were extremely thick around this mountain, instantly engulfing an area several dozen li in radius and then slowly drifting up into the sky.

One could vaguely make out that the massive tree on this mountain was swaying and letting out thunderous cries.

Why was the Wildfire there blazing so fiercely? Why did that Celestial Tree seem afraid? What was going on there?

Chapter 966 – The Gradually Emerging Truth

A demi-human elder gasped in shock, "What's going on here?"

No one answered his question, nor did anyone have the ability to. An official of the Demi-human Court was currently hurrying over to the Celestial Tree, and the mountain also had a priest. It would probably not take long for them to get a definite answer.

Madam Mu had noticed the phenomena on the great mountain quite some time ago and had even guessed at what was going on.

The young man in the bamboo hat was far beneath that mountain.

Only now did she realize that she had still managed to underestimate Black Robe.

Although it was impossible to know what exactly had occurred, it was obvious that the young man, perhaps even the entire Demon race, had probably gained a great benefit from this baptism of Wildfire within the Celestial Tree.

Just when she was pondering over whether she should go and take a look, the distant phenomena gradually dispersed.

The mist released by the Celestial Tree swiftly faded while the thunderous booms from deep underground gradually diminished until they ceased to be heard.

The Red River gradually calmed, and neither the demi-human personages in White Emperor City nor the ones around the high platform noticed anything strange.

But those two experts from the He clan currently absorbing the Wildfire of the Celestial Tree underground were greatly affected.

The Wildfire suddenly became violent beyond compare, causing one of the He clan experts to shrink in fear. In rage, the ancestral

spirit stunned him into a coma. Even if he was able to survive this experience, with his meridians severed and sea of consciousness damaged, he could no longer cultivate, leaving him with only the life of a cripple.

The other He clan expert, called Xialuo, put on a much better performance, living up to his reputation as a famous individual who had once gone to the capital to cultivate and had reached Star Condensation twenty years ago. Despite the abrupt changes to the Wildfire, the thunderous booms, and the quaking ground, he maintained a steady mind, silent and unperturbed as he waited until the end.

At this point, four out of five of the participants receiving the baptism of fire had emerged from the Celestial Trees.

The Xiang clan leader shot a sideways glance at Madam Mu. Unable to tell what she was thinking, he felt somewhat uneasy.

It didn't take too long for the young man, escorted by the priest and official, to finally return to the high platform by the river.

Holes had been burned through his clothes and he faintly smelled of char. The bamboo hat that had eternally shrouded his face was also sporting several large holes where the fire had burned through, with bamboo stems stabbing out messily in every direction. His appearance was so wretched that he seemed like a beggar on the side of a road.

Countless gazes fell on the young man, furtive, curious, and wary.

Why had the Celestial Tree he had gone to made such massive movements? This was a question that everyone wanted to know the answer to. And they also wished to know just what this enigmatic young man looked like. The Wildfire had damaged the bamboo hat, giving everyone this extremely precious chance.

It was not possible to clearly make out his features, but they

could see that his skin was very white, white like jade, and also like snow.

When they saw this dazzling white, many demi-human personages recalled a name that was gradually being forgotten by the continent: Tianhai Shengxue.

Tianhai Shengxue was also very famous amongst the Demi-human race. Other than his frequent military accomplishments in Blue Pass and Snowhold Pass, he was most famous for his skin whiter than snow.

Demi-humans had forthright personalities and did not care much for details, but they regarded delicate white as beautiful.

People who had seen Tianhai Shengxue before felt that his white was different from the white of this young man.

This young man's skin was snow that was about to melt, almost transparent with a bizarre attractive force.

The Xiang clan leader was also looking at the young man, wariness gradually taking shape in his deep and serene eyes.

He knew this young man's identity, which made him even more confused about today's events.

Since he was a demon, then even if he was a member of the Imperial clan, how could he endure the pressure of the ancestral spirit and the might of the Wildfire? Could he really have been willing to open up his spiritual world to the ancestral spirit and transform his body and blood into that of the White Emperor clan?

No, the Xiang clan leader knew that this person would never make such a choice.

Both Xiaode and Xuanyuan Po had used some other method to pass the trial of the ancestral spirit, so this person probably had his own method as well.

The Shi clan leader was also looking at this young man. Whether

or not he had seen something, his face gradually turned grave.

Despite the countless gazes, the young man remained calm.

The atmosphere around the platform was extremely oppressive and growing more fraught with tension by the minute.

But both Madam Mu and the Xiang clan leader in his capacity as Chief Elder said nothing, so no one dared to voice their doubts.

The Heavenly Selection ceremony continued, although it was now tinged with an unknown flavor.

The final item on the itinerary was very simple: the selection by mortals, not the heavens, that was mentioned yesterday in front of the Imperial City.

The four people that had passed the baptism of the Wildfire would be distributed into two matches, and then the winners of these matches would fight each other.

Xuanyuan Po's opponent was the He clan expert called Xialuo.

Xiaode's opponent was the enigmatic young man in the bamboo hat.

This result caused a burst of muffled gasps to resound around the platform.

The greatest focus was naturally placed on the second match.

Xiaode narrowed his eyes at the young man and his damaged bamboo hat, apparently wanting to say something.

The Shi clan leader's expression changed again and he ordered his clansmen to step forward and take Xiaode away, giving him no chance to speak.

The He clan leader took Xialuo away.

The Bear tribe leader took Xuanyuan Po away.

These leaders had all moved extremely quickly, so quickly that the ministers of the court and the elders had no time to react.

These leaders had not even bowed to Madam Mu or the Xiang clan leader before leaving.

The oppressive mood did not vanish. On the contrary, it only worsened.

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On the top floor of the ferry returning to White Emperor City, Xiaode and the Shi clan leader engaged in a rather awkward conversation.

Because the Shi clan leader had requested Xiaode to give up on the Heavenly Selection.

Even the most inexperienced resident of the lower city knew that Xiaode would never accept this.

The Shi clan leader stared into his eyes and said, "You were worried that the throne would fall into the Great Western Continent's hands, but now there's no need. Why do you still persist?"

Xiaode replied, "I know that the clan is not willing to see me inherit the White Emperor clan's blood, but you should be able to tell that I have other methods."

"And so what? If His Majesty or the Empress were truly willing to make you their successor, do you think they don't have their own methods?"

The Shi clan leader ruefully added, "But none of this is important. If you really could inherit the throne, then I would still support you, even if you had to change your bloodline."

Xiaode icily said, "Then why do you not want me to do this?"

"Because this feat is already impossible."

The Shi clan leader fell quiet, then said, "We did not expect that His Majesty and the Empress had already chosen a successor some

time ago."

Xiaode also fell quiet, then asked, "You are referring to that fellow?"

The Shi clan leader replied, "I think that you have also guessed at something."

Xiaode answered, "No matter who that young man is, he won't affect me."

The Shi clan leader sternly said, "This matter is too important to the Demi-human race. The Empress will not allow you to break it, nor will His Majesty."

Xiaode asked, "Who can be sure of His Majesty's will?"

The Shi clan leader explained, "Old Xiang went to the mountain two nights ago."

Xiaode harshly rebuked, "Even if this is what His Majesty thinks, it's still wrong!"

Chapter 967 – Before Tomorrow

Several days ago, Divine Domain experts had battled high above White Emperor City, and a seal had been activated over the two shores of the Red River to cut off the flow of information. Then came the Great Western Continent's diplomatic mission and the abrupt commencement of the Heavenly Selection ceremony. The successive events over the last few days had sunk White Emperor City into an abnormally tense atmosphere.

The various tribal and clan leaders had kept silent, but this did not mean that they were truly indifferent. Even though their secret investigations had suffered pressure from both the Demi-human Court and various factions in the Council of Elders, they had already found many clues and were, step by step, getting closing to the truth.

The sudden withdrawal of the Second Prince of the Great Western Continent from the Wildfire baptism had drawn all their gazes to the young man in the bamboo hat instead.

Characters like the Shi clan leader and Xiaode were even speculating that this young man came from the north.

"The humiliation of tens of thousands of years, the blood feud of countless ancestors... can they really just be forgotten?"

Xiaode's voice was cold and sharp, almost like a real blade.

The Shi clan leader turned his head to look at the high platform in the mountains. The river was vast and the mists had reemerged, so it was impossible to make out the figures on the platform.

"We once had a very a deep hatred of the Human race. Just like the Elves who ultimately fell at the hands of the Demon race, if you asked the Elves who they hated the most, they would assuredly say it was those humans in the capital. But now, just who remembers those matters of the past?"

The plains that had once been the homeland of the Elves had been occupied by the demons and then later reconquered by the humans, but the remaining Elves did not choose to return to these plains. Instead, they preferred to cross the vast seas and live in the distant Great Western Continent. Presumably, this was related to their ingrained hatred towards the Human race.

The three races that lived on this continent—human, demi-human, and demon—had a far too complex relationship. There were so many grudges in their history that one could not clearly explain it in just a few words.

But Xiaode lived in the current generation, so he had an inherent bias, a deep dislike of the Demon race.

"Even if we... ally with Xuelao City, why hold the Heavenly Selection ceremony? Are we really about to call someone from another race His Majesty?"

Just saying this was an arduous task for Xiaode, making his heart sink and his teeth turn cold, even ache a little.

He found it impossible to imagine how furious he and the tribes living along the Red River would be if such a thing really did happen.

The Shi clan leader replied, "It should just be a marriage alliance, unrelated to the throne."

Xiaode slightly raised his brows. "If Her Highness is married off to the distant Xuelao City, who will inherit the throne?"

The Shi clan leader thought for a very long time and then voiced his speculations.

Xiaode's expression suddenly changed, a tawny light flashing in the depths of his pupils as a ruthless and terrifying Qi surged out of his body.

The howling river winds collided against his heavy, hurried breathing and instantly scattered.

"Does the Empress take us to be fools that can be played with?"

The Shi clan leader bitterly smiled. "With both the court and the Council of Elders taking action at the same time, it's no wonder that we're not able to investigate the specific details, but even if we did, what can we do?"

Xiaode suddenly asked, "Just who is that young man?"

The Shi clan leader replied, "We'll have an answer tomorrow."

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Tomorrow would be a new day, and to each person that would continue to live, these words were reliable and often tedious. This was because just as tomorrow was about to arrive, one would discover that the tomorrow, the day that had just passed, and every tomorrow for the foreseeable future, were not very different at all.

But to Madam Mu, tomorrow was completely different from every other tomorrow she had experienced in her countless years.

She was confident that something fresh and interesting would happen tomorrow.

She stood by the railing at the highest point of White Emperor City, gazing at the profuse stars and drifting clouds as she calmly thought, the two of you have lived for another day.

She was thinking about Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi.

The seal over the two shores of the Red River had been removed and the Heavenly Selection ceremony had reduced White Emperor City's heavy guard from that night. In reality, however, she had never relinquished her pursuit of those two experts. Several hundred Red River Beast Guard and eunuchs of profound cultivation had secretly been searching White Emperor City this entire time.

She firmly believed that Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi, with their heavy wounds, could not possibly escape White Emperor City.

But why had she still not been able to find this couple?

Just where were they hiding?

"Since you've sought my protection, you must prove that you are worthy of protecting."

A pear tree was growing along the railing in front of the stone hall, its shadow distinct in the starlight.

With Madam Mu's voice, the shadow suddenly twisted as if alive. Then it began to bulge, transforming into a kneeling person.

If something so ugly could be called a person.

This person buried their face, their back bulged up, and their entire body stank with a fishy smell. Two gray wings of flesh were folded up behind them.

It was the monster of the Longevity Sect, Chusu.

Several days ago, he had fled Wenshui and encountered Xiao Zhang in the canyon. Though his ambush had succeeded, he did not dare pause any longer.

Logically speaking, he should have met up with the Imperial Court's diplomatic mission or hid himself in the Longevity Sect, but he had chosen neither.

Because now it was not just Chen Changsheng and the Orthodoxy that wanted to kill him. The Tang clan had joined their ranks.

In giving him a way out, the blind zither player had used up any lingering affections.

If the Tang Old Master wanted to kill him, not even the Imperial Court could protect him, much less the Longevity Sect.

Though the territory of the Great Zhou was vast, there was no

place within that he could safely reside, so he had fled for the distant land of the demi-humans as quickly as possible.

In his view, only this Saint within White Emperor City could protect him and was willing to use him.

Yet he had not expected that the moment he appeared, even before he had time to catch his breath, he would receive such a terrifying mission.

"There's also a person called Xuanyuan Po. You might as well kill him too."

Madam Mu's expression was extremely calm and apathetic, as if she was tasking him with some extremely unremarkable trifle.

To her, the Demi-human race, and the Great Western Continent, tomorrow would be a wholly new day. She would not allow a single accident to occur.

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Xuanyuan Po did not know what would happen tomorrow. He only wanted to guarantee that nothing would happen tomorrow. The greatest problem he currently faced was the abnormally massive distance between White Emperor City and the capital. No one other than Divine Domain experts could travel between them as they pleased. The seal over the two shores of the Red River had long since been released, and the Daoist Church of the Western Wastes and the Great Zhou embassy had already sent off the news of the Heavenly Selection ceremony. Based on the attitude of the Great Zhou ambassador, the capital had already sent back its reply, but when would help arrive?

Bie Yanghong looked at Xuanyuan Po and said, "The Second Prince's sudden withdrawal means that this is not an alliance between the demi-humans and the Great Western Continent. The venerable Daoist might have already seen through the befuddling

mists, resulting in his clear and unflinching stance that says that you should ruin this matter at any cost."

Xuanyuan Po was somewhat puzzled. "Shouldn't the Great Zhou Imperial Court be happy about this?"

Bie Yanghong directly touched upon the heart of the matter: "There is definitely something wrong with the identity of the young man in the bamboo hat."

Xuanyuan Po had a rather slow personality, but he was certainly no fool. He had an inkling of what this problem might be, and incredulously said, "How could that be possible?"

Chapter 968 – Before Dawn

Bie Yanghong said nothing, his calm expression explaining all. Everything was possible.

Xuanyuan Po suddenly felt a little cold. Rising, he said, "I am going to see the tribe leader."

Bie Yanghong replied, "Even if you tell him of your speculations, it will be meaningless."

Xuanyuan Po somewhat anxiously said, "Then why hasn't anyone come yet?"

"Neither the venerable Daoist nor Wang Po will come, because no one can be sure that this is not a trap."

Bie Yanghong gazed at the now-lightless crystal powder and the crooked wooden pagodas on the floor. He paused for a while, then continued, "In everyone's eyes, I and my wife are already dead, and so the Human race cannot afford to lose another expert of the Divine Domain. This would topple the entire system upon which the continent operates."

Xuanyuan Po thought, then declared, "Tomorrow, I will try my best to kill him."

Wuqiong Bi leaned against the wall, gripping the stump of her arm while she gave him a loathsome look. "We're relying on you?"

Xuanyuan Po had already learned to ignore her. He continued to look at Bie Yanghong and said, "And I think that someone will come to help me."

Bie Yanghong understood what he meant. If their speculations were true, there were assuredly many people in the Demi-human race, perhaps even influential personages, who would be just as fiercely opposed as Xuanyuan Po.

In truth, he had already confirmed the truth of the entire matter,

as he and Wuqiong Bi were severely injured because Madam Mu had allied with the demons.

Since he could not understand, he could only wait until something happened, so Xuanyuan Po walked out of the room and began to make dinner.

Upon smelling the vegetable oil and eggplant from outside, Wuqiong Bi revealed an extremely annoyed expression.

Besides braised eggplant, Xuanyuan Po had also boiled half a pot of green onions with tofu, steamed a large bowl of corn rice, and the most delicious of all was the ten-some pieces of cured meat steaming on the rice.

Xuanyuan Po and Bie Yanghong ate very earnestly, even enjoying the food.

Wuqiong Bi was missing an arm, so it was not easy for her to eat. She wanted to imitate Bie Yanghong and wrap the rice with meat, but she failed several times.

She grew angry and threw her chopsticks on the table as she cursed, "Eating nothing but pig food, it's no wonder you look like a pig!"

Bie Yanghong glanced at her, apparently wanting to soothe her with a few words. Ultimately, however, he said nothing, only sighed.

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The streets of the lower city near the Red River always felt damp, even when it was not raining. Perhaps this was because the sewage system here was not that developed, or maybe because the quality of the people here was also not very high. The residents living along these streets had a penchant for dumping their trash and filthy water on the side of the street.

A shadow slowly drifted through the garbage and greasy water filling the streets, descending the stone steps to eventually arrive at the Pine Paths.

In the last two nights, the Pine Paths had been completely different from its usual self. It was much quieter, but this did not mean that no one was there.

People filled the streets.

The Bear tribe's warriors, the Tang clan steward and ten-some cultivators from the south, and the Archbishop of the Western Wastes, accompanied by several dozen priests, had placed the area under a tight encirclement.

And yet no noise could be heard within. If one did not carefully listen, one would not even be able to distinguish the sound of breathing.

With such a vigilant and tight defense network, even experts of the Proclamation of Liberation like Xiao Zhang or Xiaode would find themselves hard-pressed to sneak inside.

But to this shadow, this was no difficult task. He cultivated the arts of the Yellow Springs and was innately sinister and foul, so he was most skilled at traveling through the earth.

With the hour late and the world quiet, the Bear warriors, priests, and southern cultivators in the Pine Paths slightly relaxed their guard.

The shadow silently reached the courtyard at the end of the alley, infiltrating into the darkness with the wind, traveling along the moss to reach the floor, and finally creeping up to the door.

Xuanyuan Po was sitting cross-legged behind the door, his eyes closed in sleep.

This was how he had slept the last two days.

Because he was in sitting in front of the paper door, anyone who

wanted to see Bie Yanghong or Wuqiong Bi would have to wake him up first.

The shadow stopped in front of the door, halting its advance.

It was not because he had sensed the power of the sword sitting across Xuanyuan Po's knees, but because he had sensed the two people behind the paper door.

The crystals were on the verge of crumbling and the wooden pagodas had lost much of their energy. Moreover, he was very close.

He could even draw a picture of those two people in his sea of consciousness.

One Daoist nun and one scholar.

It was precisely the people he needed to find.

He was naturally very shocked, but before he could feel any happiness, he felt fear.

These were two experts of the Divine Domain. Although they were heavily injured, he still did not dare to act blindly. He only wanted to retreat and bring this news back to Madam Mu.

The shadow silently returned to the courtyard, drifting over the white stones to the short pine, intending to leap over the wall.

At this moment, a strand of divine intent fell on his body.

This divine intent did not seem very formidable. Its Qi was gentle as soft silk, not harming him in the slightest.

But he did not dare move, because the message transmitted by this divine intent was crystal-clear.

If he attempted to force himself free of this divine intent, he would assuredly alarm the people beyond the wall and then receive the most powerful suppression the owner of this divine intent could muster.

But if he did not move, the owner of the divine intent would not act either, because they did not wish to alarm the demi-human experts within White Emperor City.

In the late night, the watery starlight shone over the courtyard, the short pine and its shadows rustling in the wind.

Time slowly passed with nothing unusual taking place.

There was not even a sound.

Finally, at some point, a chicken crowed, a dog barked, water gurgled, and footsteps could be heard. The streets were gradually waking up.

The morning light fell within the courtyard while the sound of water indicated that somebody was washing up, sprinkled with a few words of idle chatter. Xuanyuan Po bought breakfast and returned. He was still eating meat buns and he had still bought Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi steamed buns, porridge, and pickled vegetables. Compared to yesterday, he had also bought a set of steamed dumplings, though they had squash filling with not a single shred of meat.

The sound of falling chopsticks and overturned stools could be heard from within the room.

Xuanyuan Po opened the door and somewhat helplessly shook his head. After tying the Mountain Sea Sword to his waist, he left.

The priests outside the courtyard left, as did the Tang clan steward and the southern cultivators. The Great Zhou ambassador was already waiting in front of the Imperial City.

All the people in this district would be going to the Imperial City today to watch the fights, so the Pine Paths this morning was much quieter than usual.

The small courtyard at the end of the alley was even quieter, so still that it was somewhat frightening.

The morning rustled the short pine, its shadow trembling. The other shadow stirred like a sheet of paper.

Chusu removed his stealth technique, revealing his true body.

A fog gradually emerged within the courtyard, shutting out the morning sun.

Within the shallow canal running by the wall, several silver fish floated belly-up, already dead.

The short pine gradually turned black as if it had not been rained on in many years, gradually being caked with a thick layer of dust.

Moss began to grow on the pile of firewood while the floorboards turned damp.

The entire courtyard became extremely humid and stuffy.

This fog and moisture all came from Chusu's body.

Sludge-like sweat gushed out of his body, soaking his tattered garments and transforming into a toxic fog.

The divine intent was still attached to his body.

After the long night, he was already approaching his breaking point.

He currently had two paths before him.

Retreat or advance? Regardless of the path, he needed to snap that divine intent, making a most resolute choice.

Without hesitation, he chose the former, preparing to escape.

This was how he had managed to survive deep within the stream hidden by the Longevity Sect's great array.

Later on when he was surrounded by demon experts in the snowy plains, he had used this same method to survive.

As long as he could survive, he was willing to do the most shameless things. In the future, he would avenge himself with methods countless times crueler.

With this divine intent on him, he did not dare to lightly travel through the air. Under the cover of the fog, his two ugly wings of flesh silently broke through his clothes.

But he immediately stopped, his wings of flesh gradually slowing.

He stuck out his blood-red tongue and licked his cracked lips, then smiled.

His smile was incredibly ugly, like the corpse of an insect cracking in the heat of the sun.

He turned and peered into the fog, using his ugly and shrill voice to chuckle. "So you were just scaring me.

"You didn't attack me for an entire night not because you were worried about alarming Madam Mu or the other demi-human experts, but because you were already too heavily injured. It's impossible for you to do anything, and you didn't want that fellow to take any risks by fighting me, so you threw that strand of divine intent on me."

The morning light falling into the courtyard somewhat brightened, revealing the deep confusion in Chusu's gloomy eyes.

"You'd rather face me and the endless stream of demi-human experts that might follow me alone, but you were also unwilling to reveal my whereabouts last night and have that fellow called Xuanyuan Po experience a little risk. Why is this? Is he Sir's last disciple or... your bastard son?"

He slowly walked forward, the fog parting to reveal the porch of the house.

No sound came from the house, nor did anyone answer his question.

Chusu walked up to the house. He just need to walk up two steps and his hand would be able to touch the door.

His body was trembling somewhat, out of both anxiety and

excitement. Of course, there was also that smear of lingering fear. Although he was extremely confident that all was as he said, the thought of facing such a legendary couple still made him feel an irrepressible fear.

If possible, he would never climb these two steps, never open the door. He would not have even come up to this house.

Sweat continued to gush out of his body, the fog thickening, the floorboards growing damper. Mushrooms began to sprout on the firewood and then quickly rot away. The beams of the house and everything else made of wood began to rot and fester. A damp and pungent odor enveloped the entire courtyard.

With a clack, the door of the house fell over, revealing the paper door, through which two figures could faintly be seen.

A sigh came from behind the paper door.

The emotions contained in this sigh were not very complex, nor were they sorrowful. It was just a simple sigh, seeming particularly serene.

Damp and hot fog seeped through the wooden frame. The paper was soaked and began to curl, collapsing with the wooden frame into what seemed like a cloud of snowflakes.

In this sky of snowflakes, Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi sat against the wall.

Chapter 969 – Before the Lonely Mountain

Bie Yanghong looked at the sight outside the room, his gaze focusing.

That short figure exuding that foul and cold Qi seemed to cultivate the foulest methods in the world, but why did this Qi seem a little familiar?

But at this moment, there was no need to ponder these things.

"We are people foreordained to die, while that child is still young. Moreover, he has something very important to do today, so he cannot be disturbed."

Bie Yanghong was addressing Chusu's confusion.

Wuqiong Bi had no mind for such things. She spat at Chusu, "Just what sort of monster are you?"

Chusu smiled, but said nothing.

His smile was unpleasant to the eye and emanated a deep chill.

Wuqiong Bi became even more disgusted.

Bie Yanghong said, "I see the Qi from a senior on you. Could it be that he really did cultivate such a wicked technique?"

Chusu said nothing to this, though he seemed to be thinking of something.

After a while, he shook his head, ceasing his pursuit of those matters.

"I know that the two of you are very powerful. Even though you are both heavily injured and she has lost an arm and a great deal of blood, your final counterattack is still not something I can take. Thus I will not approach you. I will use the steadiest and most serious of methods to slowly and cautiously kill you."

Chusu added, "And then I will eat you to see if I can add to my

skills."

Wuqiong Bi was infuriated at these words, shouting, "What nonsense is this madman saying!"

"I am speaking seriously," Chusu said. "The method I cultivated mentioned such a possibility, though no one has ever tried it."

Bie Yanghong recalled a certain rumor and his expression chilled. "You truly do cultivate the Yellow Springs Flow."

Chusu did not react too much to having his cultivation method exposed. He continued to stand outside the room.

The toxic fog gradually crept towards them.

The crystals on the floor lost their last luster and the wooden pagodas faltered at the assault, cracking as they toppled.

Countless scraping noises could be heard as thousands of mice rushed out of the ground and into the courtyard, quickly covering the white stones.

These mice were covered in dirt and grease, their fur withered, their tiny eyes suffused with blood. It was an eerie sight.

Both the sight and the sound caused one's hair to stand on end.

Chusu stared at Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi, his eyes also turning bloody red, his smile eerie and horrifying.

He raised his right hand pointed forward.

Countless mice squealed as they charged past him and into the room.

Wuqiong Bi's face went ghastly white as she hid behind Bie Yanghong and screamed.

"Quickly kill these monstrous things!"

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A gasp of surprise could be heard in front of the Imperial City.

This was soon followed by many more.

The gasps of surprise joined together, gradually turning into the roar of a sea.

Even after the crowd was slightly pacified, the plaza was still buzzing.

Buzzing with the chatter of conversation.

Just a moment ago, a piece of shocking news had been delivered.

Xiaode and the He clan expert Xialuo had formally announced their withdrawal from the Heavenly Selection ceremony!

The ceremony had already reached its last phase, just a step from the final victory, supreme glory, and a beautiful future, but now participants were withdrawing?

This was especially bewildering in Xiaode's case—he was a true expert of the front ranks of the Proclamation of Liberation who was viewed optimistically by all of the demi-human populace. No matter how domineering Xuanyuan Po had appeared two days ago or how mysterious was the young man in the bamboo hat, Xiaode's status in the hearts of the populace was unshakable, and yet he had also withdrawn?

But why?

No matter how much the crowd speculated, Xiaode and the He clan expert had already withdrawn.

No one knew that from start to finish, the Heavenly Selection ceremony had been under Madam Mu's control.

The only surprise, or perhaps regret, was that Xuanyuan Po was not dead.

In her view, Chusu was far stronger than Xuanyuan Po, and coupled with the bizarre and insidious nature of the Yellow Springs Flow technique, Xuanyuan Po should have had zero chance

of survival.

Just what had happened last night? Why had the lower city remained silent? Had the little monster not dared to strike?

Madam Mu stood at the railing, her hands held behind her as she calmly gazed at White Emperor City.

She drew back her gaze from that district along the Red River and looked towards the plaza in front of the Imperial City.

From this height, the crowd on the plaza looked like a pack of ants.

Was this the feeling of looking down on the world?

She remained expressionless, though the slight curve in her lip seemed to contain a great deal of derision and exhaustion.

The pack of ants suddenly moved, as if parted into two by some invisible power.

Were they dividing into camps?

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The spectating demi-humans had very naturally split into two camps.

Xuanyuan Po had far more people at his back than his opponent, a mass behind him so thick and vast that it packed the area around Heavensguard Pavilion.

His opponent was naturally the young man in the bamboo hat.

The young man stood across from him, before a few people with nothing better to do and some officials with rather complicated expressions.

Compared to Xuanyuan Po's momentum, he seemed rather lonely, even pitiful, but for some reason, he gave off nothing of the sort.

Perhaps it was because his demeanor was too calm, too routine.

He stood on the white stones, his hands hanging at his sides.

He said nothing, and did not adopt any postures, like folding his arms, holding his hands behind him, or staring off into the distant mountains.

But everyone who saw him would get the feeling that to this young man, everything in this world was just part of a routine.

Whether it was life and death, the Heavenly Selection, or this battle.

Xuanyuan Po also noticed this change.

The young man gave off a different feeling from the one he had given off for the past two days.

In the last two days, this young man was like a flower in the mist, its true appearance shrouded, easy to ignore.

Today, the fog had dispersed.

There had been no flower in the mist, only a lonely mountain.

Impossible to climb, difficult to approach.

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Countless gazes fell on those two figures in front of the Imperial City.

The vast majority of the populace naturally supported Xuanyuan Po. Without mentioning his background, the thunderous momentum he had created with only his iron fist two days ago had attracted many ardent worshippers.

As for the young man in the bamboo hat, although he seemed enigmatic, his methods unfathomable, how could the unknowing populace possibly support him?

Xuanyuan Po thought differently from the populace.

They had just looked at each other.

But he knew that he was no match.

When a lonely mountain appeared in the world, what sort of scenery would not look ordinary?

The young man's cultivation level was far higher than his.

Let alone him, even if Xiaode had not withdrawn or Chen Changsheng had come, they still might not be guaranteed victory.

And then he recalled Bie Yanghong's words from last night. If his opponent really was from that snowy city in the north, what should he do?

"No matter what you want to do today, I will stop you."

He paused, then added, "Even if I have to die."

Chapter 970 – The Lightning Tearing Open the Darkness

If the young man in the bamboo hat really was from Xuelao City, then Xuanyuan Po would not mind paying everything, even his own life, to stop him.

This was what he had decided.

The young man was unaffected by this statement, his visage remaining serene.

It was the feeling that he gave everyone: to him, everything was routine, even life and death.

Both sides had already expressed their stances, so now it was time to prove them.

Xuanyuan Po knew that his opponent was very strong, at least much stronger than him, so he chose to strike first.

From the morning two days ago when he stood on the crude fighting platform in the Pine Paths, his nine consecutive victories, up to now, this was his first time striking first.

The ground thudded as his fur shoes struck the hard stone ground.

The chilly air in front of the Imperial City suddenly began to pop.

These popping sounds were not very loud, but they were extremely clear.

This was the sound of air being struck and, not having time to compress, being blasted apart.

One could imagine just how fast Xuanyuan Po was. The surrounding spectators simply could not see him, only a faint blur.

Behind the blur was a trail of dust, its target the young man in the bamboo hat.

Xuanyuan Po's left fist flew through the air, howling with the unimaginable strength and power of a thunderstorm.

Before the fist arrived, dust rose, shrouding the area like dark clouds.

The young man walked out of the dust.

And then, he placed his left hand behind him.

With this movement, his Qi changed.

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Xiaode had withdrawn from the Heavenly Selection, but he had still come to see the match.

He had brought ten-some subordinates with him, their group standing on a slope near Heavensguard Pavilion. He silently watched the events taking place in front of the Imperial City, seemingly thinking of something.

Neither the young man appearing like a lonely mountain nor Xuanyuan Po's determined and forceful declaration had caused a single change in his expression.

But when he saw the young man walk out of the dust and place his left hand behind his back, Xiaode's expression suddenly changed, his complexion somewhat paling.

This made him recall that sight in Mount Han from many years ago.

The middle-aged scholar in front of the forest had held his hands in the same way.

The middle-aged scholar had had his back to him and Liu Qing, attentively observing the fruit.

A demi-human expert and the world's number-one assassin?

When he turned around, the darkness shrouded all one thousand

li of Mount Han.

Everything in the world was naturally just routine, not even worth mentioning.

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The young man walked out of the dust.

He was still not the middle-aged scholar of Mount Han, so the sky over White Emperor City did not suddenly dim.

But when he raised his right hand to meet Xuanyuan Po's left fist, the darkness still came as usual.

The darkness could shroud the thousand li of Mount Han, could obscure the entire sky, could contain or swallow all things. It could naturally block a fist.

Without any sound, Xuanyuan Po's fist was gripped in his palm.

Nothing happened afterward.

To grip was to capture, leaving one powerless to leave, not unless the morning light fell upon the earth once more, the world instantly advancing to the dawn of the next day.

At this sight, both the spectating populace and the important personages watching from a distance were shocked speechless.

Two days ago, in the lower city districts, Xuanyuan Po's fist had exhibited an unimaginable strength and momentum in the fighting platform matches, each punch able to tear open the sky and crack the earth. After winning nine matches in a row, he really did manage to fight out an impressive reputation for himself. He had even become regarded as a god by the impoverished demi-humans.

But today, Xuanyuan Po's fist seemed incredibly weak, not even able to escape his opponent's palm!

Just how powerful was this young man!

The atmosphere became abnormally tense, the air seeming to freeze. The faces of the crowd were covered in shock and concern.

Xuanyuan Po's expression remained unchanged. It could be called dull-witted, but it could also be described as composed.

It was just like it was a moment ago, a day ago, a few years ago.

He did not panic, as he had long since confirmed that the young man was far stronger than he was.

More importantly, he had still not used his strongest move.

Whether it was in the nine battles two days ago or the last several years of conflicts in the small tavern and in the Pine Paths, he had never used this sort of move.

Even if one went back as far as the capital and the Orthodox Academy, he had still never truly used this sort of move.

His strongest move was still his fist.

But rather than his pristine left fist, it was... that withered, crippled right fist.

Xuanyuan Po raised his right fist and swung it forward.

His right arm had once been severely injured, all of its meridians snapped by Tianhai Ya'er. Later on, Chen Changsheng's treatment almost completely cured it. But as he began to learn a certain technique, not only did his right arm not fully recover, its condition began to worsen, particularly in the last few years, in which it had greatly atrophied.

Right now, his arm was extremely thin, like a tree branch or the arm of a child. When compared to the rest of his stalwart body, it looked even more pitiful.

In the small tavern by the river, this was the primary reason for the jeers aimed at him.

Today, no one dared to jeer at him, only sympathize with and pity him.

He was clearly no match but refused to give up. In the eyes of the crowd, Xuanyuan Po was very brave, but this sort of bravery made their hearts ache.

Xuanyuan Po paid no attention to the sighs from around him. With great focus, he silently swung his arm to smash at his opponent's face.

It was a smash rather than a punch, because his hand was clenched in a fist and swinging from up to down, using the bottom of his fist instead of the sturdiest part, the front.

This was somewhat like somebody slapping the table in dismay, but more like striking the filthy water in the washing basin out of anger.

In truth, it was most similar to a falling hammer.

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In the forest next to Heavensguard Pavilion, Xiaode's expression suddenly changed and he took a step forward.

On the observation platform, the Xiang clan leader suddenly opened his eyes.

Within the stone hall, Madam Mu's slender brows rose like swords.

In this scene, the ordinary people could only see dejection and despair, but they could see more.

For instance, when Xuanyuan Po swung his fist, the Qi of the Wildfire emanated by the distant Celestial Trees suddenly began to surge out!

A massive black bear appeared in the sky!

It stretched out its sharp claws, tearing open the darkness over the Imperial City!

Rain clouds emerged from this darkness, lightning crackling deep within them!

The plaza in front of the Imperial City was illuminated in a dazzling light.

Within the blinding light, Xuanyuan Po's right arm flew forward, rapidly expanding.

His fist multiplied in size, a metal hammer in the hand of a god.

His fist descended like a hammer.

The bolt of lightning descended with it.

Boom!

Fist and lightning struck the young man at the same time.

Chapter 971 – The Stone Seal That Cannot Be Injured

The darkness was torn open.

The daylight arrived.

The lightning fell.

The fist descended.

Everything happened in the briefest of moments.

Only a few true experts could clearly make out everything that had occurred, like Xiaode or those important personages in the Imperial City.

The demi-human commoners on the plaza could only see a blinding light and the silhouette of a massive black bear in the sky. Their mouths were agape in shock as they struggled to make a noise, and then they were roused by a massive boom and pushed back by a wave of Qi.

Swift winds howled, stirring up all the dust between the stones, blocking out all vision and slightly dimming that light.

But the bolt of lightning was unconcealably bright, those two figures crystal-clear.

The young man in the bamboo hat had finally brought his left hand away from his back, raising it in front of him to block Xuanyuan Po's iron-like right fist.

His hand clenched into a fist as well.

This time, the darkness could no longer swallow everything.

The bolt of lightning falling from the sky, together with Xuanyuan Po's fist, accurately struck the young man's fist.

Countless arcs of dazzling lightning wound around Xuanyuan Po's right arm, crackling and popping.

Boom! The two fists unleashed two unimaginably violent energies!

Innumerable cracks instantly appeared on the ground!

Even more shocking was that these cracks extended so deep into the ground that it was impossible to see their bottom.

The young man's arm was trembling, his clothes shaking. One could barely make out that his face had grown incredibly solemn.

With a swish, several holes were torn in his bamboo hat by the sharp winds, making it look rather sorry.

Had Xuanyuan Po really won?

Just when the crowd was beginning to get excited, the lightning suddenly vanished.

The young man in the bamboo hat had seemingly used some sort of spell that was not of this world.

The lightning that was plainly bursting with the unimaginable energies of the world had vanished into that strange palm of his.

There was a light plop, like a ripe fruit smashing into the ground into a pile of pulp.

It was a very quiet sound, hard to hear in the howling gales.

Several demi-human personages high up in the Imperial City heard it.

Outside Heavensguard Pavilion, Xiaode also heard, and his complexion became extremely unsightly.

He had once heard this sound in Mount Han.

The darkness once more shrouded the world.

The darkness had a weight, such a weight that even the world would find it hard to bear at times.

This was the sound of the hardest object cracking.

This object could be a Heavenstone from Mount Han, the cold stone of a lonely mountain, or perhaps a hard fist.

The fierce gales suddenly dissipated.

Xuanyuan Po's fist and the young man's fist parted.

White steam gushed out from Xuanyuan Po's clothes and then was quickly condensed by the cold winds into drops of water that soaked the ground.

It was like a scene that could be seen each morning in front of that store in the Pine Paths that sold steamed buns.

A stream of blood spurted from his lips, soaking the stones even further.

Xuanyuan Po's body swayed as a burst of cracks came from his body.

Ten-some spurts of blood shot out of his body like arrows, poking ten-some new holes in his clothes. The blood looked like a waterfall falling in reverse.

At this sight, the crowd resounded with countless cries and screams.

The personages in the Imperial City remained quiet, different expressions on their faces.

The Bear tribe leader turned to look at the Chief Elder, his complexion as cold as ice.

Outside Heavensguard Pavilion, Xiaode had an even nastier complexion than the Bear tribe leader.

They all knew that Xuanyuan Po had lost, and most miserably at that. Ten-some Qi openings had been shattered, and if they turned out to be untreatable, Xuanyuan Po was highly likely to end up a cripple.

They had anticipated this conclusion, but when they saw the fist and lightning descending, they thought a miracle might occur.

Xiaode had not expected any miracle, but he at least thought that the young man would have been pushed to his limit in receiving the blow.

This was because in his view, if it were him, he would have to pay a heavy price to take on this fist.

Who could have expected that the young man had not even retreated a single step!

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The young man in the bamboo hat slowly drew back his hands.

Then, he slowly retreated three steps.

In this entire process, he stared into Xuanyuan Po's eyes, his expression abnormally solemn and vigilant.

Only after he retreated three steps and saw that Xuanyuan Po had not attacked again did he finally confirm that his opponent had no further ability to fight.

The chilly wind rustled the tattered bamboo hat, revealing more of his face.

One could make out that his face was extremely handsome and possessed a bewitching charm. It was even paler than it was yesterday, completely devoid of blood.

"I had guessed that your right hand was powerful, but not this powerful."

He looked at Xuanyuan Po and said, "Though you had not even fought a single battle in the Orthodox Academy, an exception was made to rank you in the Proclamation of Azure Sky. Now that I think about it, old man Heavenly Secrets really did have some insight."

Xuanyuan Po remained at his original position, his body covered in blood. "But I still could not defeat you."

The young man fell quiet for a while, then answered, "You truly are very talented, and the technique Chen Changsheng chose for you is also very strong, suitable as well. But the so-called Heavenly Thunder is still contained and born within the rain clouds, but I am not a person of the mortal world. I was born above the clouds, so how could the Heavenly Thunder strike me?"

His voice was somewhat shaky as he said this, his complexion paling even further.

It was evident that in order to receive Xuanyuan Po's fist, he had also paid no small price. It had not been as easy for him as Xiaode had believed.

But this was not the real reason for his trembling voice and paling complexion. It was because he was lying. He was the most revered sovereign in the world, possessing a supreme pride and majesty, but in the face of such a lowly opponent, he had been compelled to use other methods, and even needed to lie. He felt deeply humiliated.

The move Xuanyuan Po had used just now was the most powerful technique in the Heavenly Thunder Bringer.

Even he had to pay a heavy price to receive such a move. Perhaps it could even be described as a disastrous price.

But after this, he needed to complete the most important mission in the last thousand years of history within White Emperor City, so he had to appear invincible. He could not allow himself to be injured.

So he had not used his own body, cultivation, and strength to defeat Xuanyuan Po, but used another method.

At the start, he had placed his left hand behind his back not because he was taking his enemy lightly or because he was confident. It was because he wanted to guarantee that he could remove an item from his belt at any moment.

This item was a stone seal.

The more he felt the hardness of the stone seal in his palm, the unhappier he was.

In order to conceal his displeasure, he wanted to appear even more aloof and indifferent.

His gaze fell on the sword tied to Xuanyuan Po's waist. "If you used this sword, perhaps you might have been able to last a little longer."

Xuanyuan Po gazed at his clenched left fist and shook his head. "Even if I used the sword, I still wouldn't be able to beat that object in your hand."

When he said this, his expression remained very composed, or perhaps it was dull-witted.

But the young man felt that these words were brimming with derision and disdain, and an icy killing intent appeared in his eyes.

Chapter 972 – All Alone, a Stranger in a Strange Land

The young man in the bamboo hat quietly stared at Xuanyuan Po, gradually calming down.

The killing intent vanished, leaving only absolute calm and cold.

Both his voice and expression were cold to the extreme.

In his view, Xuanyuan Po was a walking corpse, an inevitable object of sacrifice.

"Even if I used nothing, you still would be no match for me. In front of me, Chen Changsheng was also just a dog, so how could you do any better? Once I complete my task, I will kill you. Of course, I will not personally kill you. I will let you die painfully and despairingly at the hands of your own race."

Xuanyuan Po remained silent. He stood there covered in blood, giving no response.

With this, victory and defeat were decided.

It appeared that no one would be able to stop the young man from gaining the final victory in the Heavenly Selection ceremony.

All around the Imperial City was silence, with not a single sound to be heard.

That the young man in the bamboo hat had been able to so easily defeat Xuanyuan Po had stunned everyone.

Even more shocking was the information vaguely implied by the young man's words.

Just who was he? He dared to call the Elder of Heavenly Secrets 'old man' and say that the Pope was just a dog before him?

Countless gazes fell upon him, and also upon his bamboo hat.

The gaze of the Archbishop of the Western Wastes, on the other

hand, rested on the young man's left hand.

Earlier, in the instant that the young man clenched his fist, the archbishop had caught a glimpse of a seal.

As an archbishop of great seniority within the Orthodoxy, he knew of many old secrets. Coupled with the urgent message he had received from the Li Palace last night, he had already guessed at who the young man was, and it was the answer he had least wanted to see.

The archbishop's complexion was rather pale, his body trembling.

The Great Zhou ambassador and the Tang clan steward glanced at each other, seeing the shock and fear in each other's eyes.

The archbishop's body suddenly stopped trembling while a stern and somber Qi began to rise from his red robes.

The shock in the eyes of the ambassador and steward also turned into determination.

They had already confirmed the identity of the young man in the bamboo hat, so the demi-humans should have known long beforehand. Yet there had been no disturbances within White Emperor City over the last few days, and even now, those influential figures within the Imperial City remained passive. What did this mean?

There was no hesitation. Even if they would instigate a sudden conflict, they could not allow the demi-humans to continue their secret exchange with this person!

A resounding shout, filled with fear and wariness, rang out in front of the Imperial City.

"This guy is a demon!"

Right after, another shout rose from the crowd.

"He's a demon!"

Shout after shout rang out over the Imperial City, no one able to stop their words from falling into the ears of the demi-humans.

"You are a demon!"

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The young man in the bamboo hat was actually a demon!

In front of the Imperial City, there was sudden silence, swiftly followed by turmoil.

Once more, the crowd turned to gaze at the young man.

Their earlier gazes had mostly been ones of respect and confusion, but now they were wary, annoyed, loathing.

The high official in charge of the Heavenly Selection ceremony frowned at the young man.

The Beast Guard and soldiers in front of the Imperial City were even more startled. They raised their weapons and aimed them at the young man.

The young man in the bamboo hat calmly stood, not intending to escape or even explain himself.

He looked around at the crowd, easily finding the source of the first shouts.

A priest, a military officer of the Great Zhou embassy, and a merchant's steward.

He realized that the Human race had already prepared themselves for this day, which made him somewhat surprised.

According to the military advisor's plan, the fastest the capital could respond would be tonight.

Where had the problem occurred? Or was it that the representatives of the Human race in White Emperor City were acting on their own?

But none of this mattered, so he immediately ceased pondering these questions.

He had intended on stating his identity today anyway, so although having it exposed had caused a little turmoil, it could not affect the greater situation.

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"This guy is really a demon? How did he sneak into the city?"

"I always thought it was weird that he always kept that bamboo hat on. It looked sneaky, but it turns out it was to hide his identity."

"There are two big holes in that hat, but I don't see any demon horns."

"What if this guy is a descendant of the Demon Imperial clan?"

The plaza in front of the Imperial City was raucous, the crowd surrounding the young man growing more and more astonished as they talked.

Ever since the alliance with the humans was established a thousand years ago, excepting an extremely small number of spies, a demon had not been seen in White Emperor City for many years.

And this young man in the bamboo hat was highly likely to be a descendant of the Demon Imperial clan!

The high official supervising the Heavenly Selection ceremony had an incredibly cold expression as he sternly ordered, "Seize him!"

Several hundred elite members of the powerful Red River Beast Guard slowly pushed their way to the center of the plaza.

The young man glanced at Xuanyuan Po.

Xuanyuan Po was covered in blood with many bones broken. It

was no longer possible for him to move.

It would be perfectly fine if he captured Xuanyuan Po and used his life to threaten the demi-humans.

Xuanyuan Po was the future of the Bear tribe, Princess Luoluo's student, and most importantly, he had represented the Orthodox Academy in his matches.

The demi-humans needed to consider the Li Palace's stance.

Yet the young man did not do this.

He just stood and watched, allowing several priests and two southern cultivators to venture through the crowd and take Xuanyuan Po away.

At this sight, some of the crowd couldn't help but grow uncertain, thinking, if he really is one of those monstrously evil demons, would he really be willing to be captured?

The young man asked, "Why do you want to seize me?"

The high official of the Demi-human Court replied, "We must confirm that you are not a demon spy."

The young man fell quiet for a while, then replied, "This does not need confirmation, because I have never denied it."

Since he did not deny it, he admitted to it.

The crowd was in an uproar.

Several shrill cries could be heard in the sky as black silhouettes flashed past.

The gray vultures had left the city walls and were prepared to fight.

One could see several demi-human supervisors running down the steps leading to the Imperial City.

The gates of the cavalry barracks behind Heavensguard Pavilion began to slowly open, the sound of hooves coming from within.

The young man's identity had caused all of White Emperor City to grow nervous.

He was very calm, not feeling the slightest bit nervous.

Although he was a demon, he was no spy.

A calm and lofty voice came down from the Imperial City.

"One who has come from afar is a guest. I invite you."

These words instantly silenced the crowd.

The populace was both shocked and perplexed.

The high official was even more astonished, thinking that he had misheard.

The Red River Beast Guard felt the same.

The Archbishop of the Western Wastes and the Great Zhou ambassador wore extremely unsightly expressions.

It was like they had heard news that the demons had won a battle.

The young man faintly smiled and began to walk toward the Imperial City.

Yes, he was not a spy.

He was a guest.

A guest invited by White Emperor City.

1. While this chapter title brings to mind the Robert Heinlein novel 'Stranger in a Strange Land', it is actually a line from the poem 'Thinking of My Brothers in Shandong on the Double Ninth' by the Tang Dynasty poet Wang Wei.

Chapter 973 – Xuelao City's Sincerity

The calm and lofty voice belonged to Madam Mu.

As the Empress of the Demi-human race and the only remaining Saint, she held unimaginable prestige within White Emperor City. But even she would find it an extremely challenging task to turn a demon into a guest. Such an action was highly likely to lead to a furious wave of protest.

The demi-human personages within the hall had far more power than the ordinary populace in front of the Imperial City, so they naturally had even more thoughts on their minds.

Only the giant figure seated at the highest seat remained quiet and unmoving, their eyes closed in silence. It was deaf to the accusations against the young man, deaf to Madam Mu's invitation, and so the stone hall was much quieter than one would expect.

Silence often symbolized oppression. The mood in the stone hall was fraught with tension. The tribal leaders of the Council of Elders and the generals and ministers of the court gave each other meaningful glances, silently stared at the ground, or narrowed their eyes as they waited for the young man in the bamboo hat to arrive.

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The Beast Hall was located at the highest point of the Imperial City. In front of the hall was a large stone platform, and on the edge of the platform, a pear tree had been planted. Beyond the pear tree was a long railing made of stone. If one stood at this railing, one would be able to look down upon all the streets of White Emperor City and the turbid waves of the Red River, and even see the Celestial Trees several hundred li away.

This was the famous observation platform of the Imperial City.

The people who had the right to stand here were not here to view the scenery, but to regard the countryside, the world.

The young man in the bamboo hat walked onto the observation platform. He stood beneath the pear tree and gazed at that building made of massive stones, the Beast Hall. He did not seem intent on entering.

Whispered sounds were coming from the stone hall, mixed in with the sounds of breathing and the unexpressed thoughts of the mind.

After some time, a real voice finally came out of the stone hall. The speaker was the Grand Duke of the Demi-human Court. This important personage of the Deer tribe had always been very subdued, but for some reason, he had chosen to speak first today.

"Sire has traveled from the distant Xuelao City. For what purpose?"

The young man replied, "Of course, it is to participate in the Heavenly Selection ceremony."

The Carp tribe leader spoke, his voice gloomy and cold, like a mountain spring in the depths of winter. "You wish to marry Princess Luoluo?"

The young man indifferently answered, "Correct. I have always adored the nobility of Her Highness, so I came specially to participate in the Heavenly Selection ceremony. Is this inappropriate? According to my knowledge, neither the rules of the Heavenly Selection nor the demi-human laws forbid this."

The Carp tribe leader's voice was even colder as he asked, "You think that a demon also has this right?"

The young man calmly answered, "The Wildfire of the Celestial Tree is impartial. Yesterday, I passed the trial of the ancestral spirit, so I have the right."

The hall was quiet for a while. The demi-human personages did not know how to respond to these words. Many people had personally witnessed the activity on the mountain yesterday, and the chief priest had confirmed afterward that the young man really had passed the trial of the ancestral spirit. The traditions of the Demi-human race dictated that no matter where the young man in the bamboo hat came from, he should now be regarded as one of demi-human blood, but...

The Carp tribe leader's voice remained cold, though somewhat less than before. "Even if you have passed the Wildfire baptism and the trial of the ancestral spirit, even gained victory in the Heavenly Selection ceremony, you are still a demon, so how can you marry the princess of my race?"

The Deer tribe Grand Duke voiced his agreement. "Yes, such a thing has never happened. It is too absurd."

"Incorrect," the young man calmly said. "This sort of matter has happened many times throughout history."

At these words, the stone hall suddenly became rather noisy. In the long river of history, there were truly many princesses of the Demi-human race who had been married off to the distant Xuelao City, especially two thousand years ago. However, this was no rosy period of history, but an era of humiliation for the Demi-human race. Several tribal leaders and generals began to curse at the person outside the hall, and two with violent temperaments took out their blades and axes, wanting to hack the young man to death.

Amidst this noise, a voice suddenly spoke.

It was an incredibly deep voice, humming as it echoed through the spacious stone hall.

The cursing and discussion vanished while the two generals holding blade and axe also stopped.

Because this voice came from the Chief Elder, the second most

powerful individual of the Demi-human race, the Xiang clan leader.

"Just what are your intentions?"

The cessation of conversation and cursing and the halting of the two generals had been out of respect for the Xiang clan leader.

But the silence of individuals like the Shi clan leader and the Bear tribe leader had a deeper meaning.

Last night, with the hints of the Daoist Church of the Western Wastes and the help of certain factions, they had finally discovered, or guessed, something.

The truth still remained shrouded in the mists of the mountains, still not completely revealed, but the Xiang clan leader probably already knew the young man's identity. This being the case, why was he asking him about his true intentions? What did this mean?

If they continued along this line of thinking, the questions of the Grand Duke and the Carp tribe leader were also problematic.

Their words had seemed like accusations meant to make things difficult for this young man from Xuelao City, but in reality, they were giving the young demon an opportunity to explain. Moreover, through these conversations, they had succeeded in somewhat dispelling the shock and anger brought by this matter.

The Shi clan leader and the Bear tribe leader glanced at each other, seeing the shock and apprehension in each other's eyes.

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The Xiang clan leader's voice traveled from the stone hall to the observation platform.

His voice was like an ancient bell, suffused with a limitless power. Even though he had not fully displayed his strength, his voice still stirred a gale.

It was clearly midwinter, but the pear tree on the observation platform was blossoming with flowers.

The gale caused the white flowers to rustle down onto the bamboo hat and onto the young man's shoulders.

The young man's lips curved up into a faint smile as he extracted a thin book from his sleeve.

With a light flick of his finger, the thin book took flight, slowly flying into the hall like it was being dragged by an invisible string.

After some time, a cry of surprise came out of the stone hall.

This was followed by a succession of cries interspersed with a few statements of disbelief.

"What is this?"

"Is this a map of the snowy plains in the land of demons?"

"Just what are the demons up to? What is the meaning of this red line? Do they want to cede this part of their territory?"

"This is definitely a scheme, Black Robe's scheme!"

As time passed, the shouts and arguments subsided, leaving the hall silent.

One could barely make out the breathing of those demi-human personages, a somewhat rapid breathing.

The absolute silence pervading the hall resulted in a strangely oppressive mood.

Perhaps it was out of anxiety, or shock, or maybe even excitement.

After some time, a shaky voice asked, "You... can represent Xuelao City?"

The young man brushed a small white flower off his shoulder and replied, "Of course."

Another voice asked, "Xuelao City... how will you prove your

sincerity?"

The young man calmly answered, "This lord has personally come. Is this not a sign of sincerity?"

Chapter 974 – Opening a New Chapter in History?

'Jun' could be a name, could be a surname, but in most occasions, it was a form of address¹.

Of the heavens and earth, the lord, the parents, and the teacher, it was the one right in the middle.

The young man in the bamboo hat was a demon and called himself 'lord', so his status was obvious.

He was the Demon Lord.

The stone hall was absolutely silent.

In truth, a clap of thunder was booming in everyone's minds.

The power of this thunder was so frightening that it stunned all of the Imperial City into silence, stunned the pear blossoms so that they did not dare to fall.

Other than the solitary figure of the young man, the observation platform remained deserted and cheerless, but other places were already restless.

One could spy the swift-moving figures of the Beast Guard all around the Imperial City.

One could spy the banners of the cavalry all around the Imperial City.

The Imperial City was quickly surrounded.

The seal across the two shores of the Red River was silently activated.

Even an expert of the Divine Domain would find it very difficult to leave.

So why was the young Demon Lord still so calm?

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The atmosphere in the stone hall was extremely oppressive as flames danced in the minds of the demi-human personages.

Their gazes fell on the highest point in the front of the hall.

Even now, Madam Mu remained silent.

The Shi clan leader slowly narrowed his eyes, making them seem like the golden willows one would occasionally find in the upper reaches of the Red River, but more like the famous slender blades that could be found in the southern lands of the demi-human domain.

The true identity of the young demon had truly given him a great shock, but most concerning to him was still the activity within the hall.

He had expected Madam Mu's silence, but why was the Xiang clan leader also so quiet?

Was it really possible? Then this was worse than the worst situation he and Xiaode had imagined!

At this moment, a demi-human general stood up and sternly shouted, "Empress, please permit this general to kill this enemy!"

These words shattered the silence of the stone hall, tearing open the oppressive atmosphere. The dancing flames were gradually about to turn into a real wildfire.

More ministers, generals, and even several tribal leaders stood up, angrily shouting at the Empress seated at the highest point.

"Kill him!"

"Empress, kill him!"

Furious roars echoed through the vast confines of the stone hall, spreading to the observation platform and beyond.

All of the Imperial City could probably hear these words.

Deep within the mountains, the nine Celestial Trees began to release an even hotter and fiercer Qi, perhaps a sign of the ancestral spirits' fury.

Madam Mu continued to quietly sit on the highest seat, giving no answer.

The one to reply to these words was the Demon Lord himself.

Though wave after wave of calls to kill him emerged from the hall, he remained expressionless, his voice flat.

"Why must you kill this lord? Because of this lord's identity and background? Because of the thousand-year grudges between the two races? The thousand-year grudges arise from the tyranny and humiliation my Divine race inflicted on the Demi-human race, but what does that have to do with me? I am still very young and was not even born back then, so these accounts cannot be forced on me."

The calls to kill gradually faded away, after which came the enraged roar of a demi-human general.

A somewhat complicated smile appeared on the Demon Lord's wan face. It was hard to tell whether it was one of ridicule at others, or ridicule at himself.

"Yes, the one who tyrannized you, humiliated you, slaughtered you, was my father. It's not wrong to say that the son should pay the debts of the father, but all of you seem to have forgotten something. All of you loathe my father the most, and I was the one that killed him, so from a certain standpoint, shouldn't you be thanking me?"

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The atmosphere in the stone hall was once more oppressed, just

like the gloomy light.

Other than Xiaode and Jin Yulu, who could not be present for various reasons, all the important figures of the Demi-human race were present.

They could decide all matters regarding the Demi-human race.

But what they would do today would be one of the most important decisions made in the entire history of the Demi-human race.

So they were very nervous and uneasy. There were even some tribal leaders and ministers who felt burdened by an endless confusion and dread.

For a very long time, nobody spoke within the quiet hall. The only sound was breathing, silent as a mystery; breathing, heavy as the mountains.

The scent of mountain fruits and scholar tree candles was completely replaced by the stench of sweat mixed with fur.

The scholar tree candles were gradually extinguished, but the lanterns on the stone wall were not lit. Only the faint light of the Night Pearls illuminated those countless faces and all their shifting expressions.

Madam Mu flickered in and out of the dim light, as dark as the night.

The Xiang clan leader remained silent, as indistinct as a mountain in the darkness.

A piece of paper several zhang wide floated in the stone hall, looking like some sort of belt.

This was the thin book that the Demon Lord had sent into the hall.

Countless gazes fell on its surface, upon which the sound of breathing grew even heavier.

This signified tension and excitement, symbolized ambition and greed.

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The Demon Lord was very young, and his words and actions could not be described as shrewd, but they were strangely persuasive.

Whether or not the demi-human personages believed him, they had to admit that he had started these talks very candidly.

A hatred as deep as the sea existed between the demi-humans and demons, but the tragic past of humiliation and slaughter was now a story from one thousand years ago.

Today, no one within the Imperial City had personally experienced this period. Although the hatred had persisted, this did not mean that it would always be impossible to dispel.

Even if it could not be dispelled, it truly had little to do with the young Demon Lord.

Then could they temporarily put their grudges aside and consider a few more important concerns?

Like gains and safety?

The conditions offered by the demons were too excellent.

The demi-humans would gain too much.

This already exceeded their imaginations.

Even the most irascible of the tribal leaders, the generals who loathed the demons most, could only remain silent in the face of these conditions.

This did not mean that they were willing to accept the demons' conditions, just that they were seeking better ways to respond.

The sincerity of the demons was also very difficult to question.

Because the Demon Lord had personally come to White Emperor City, and he had come alone.

This meant that he could be killed at any moment.

In these circumstances, no one could say anything.

Crucially, it was now evident that the Empress had known of this matter the entire time. Perhaps this had even been arranged by her.

More and more gazes left the map of the snowy plains and looked to Madam Mu.

Only at this moment was the true appearance, the goal, of the Heavenly Selection revealed.

The rumor that Madam Mu intended to marry Princess Luoluo to the Second Prince of the Great Western Continent had turned out to be a smokescreen.

From the start, Madam Mu had intended to marry Princess Luoluo to the young Demon Lord outside.

The goal of the marriage between two Imperial clans was naturally the alliance between two races.

Such a grand event naturally had to be concealed from the Human race until it succeeded, which had led to all those events.

But... did His Majesty think the same?

But... they were demons!

Did they really have to forget the grudges of the past and the blood spilt by the tribal warriors in these last few years?

Did they really have to betray their ally, the Human race, which they had fought side by side with for a thousand years?

Many tribal leaders and generals could not accept this.

Their gazes fell on the mountainous figure at the front of the hall.

This was the Chief Elder of the Council of Elders.

In their view, only the Xiang clan leader, the oldest and most renowned amongst them, could stand up and lead all of them in putting a stop to this matter.

1. 'Jun', 君, means 'lord'. It is also the 'Jun' of 'Qiushan Jun'.

Chapter 975 – A Temple of Xining Worries the World

From the start of the talks, it could be seen that the Deer tribe and the Carp tribe were standing on the Empress's side, supporting the alliance with the demons.

There were probably many ministers in the court, some elders, and a few generals who also took this stance.

So then, who would stand up and make their opposition known?

In terms of both seniority and prestige, the Xiang clan leader was the ideal choice.

Everyone knew that he was the White Emperor's most loyal subordinate, his most reliable companion. Perhaps it was for this reason that though the Empress's prestige had been constantly rising along the two shores of the Red River, he had never evinced much passion. Their relationship was always one of indifference.

Moreover, the Xiang clan leader had gone to visit the White Emperor several days ago. Although they had not met, it was said that they had communicated using their spiritual senses.

If the White Emperor disagreed with this matter, the Xiang clan leader would assuredly declare this. Some of the more astute tribal leaders thought that even if the White Emperor had not made his opinion known, occupied as he was in recovering from his injuries, it was completely acceptable for the Xiang clan leader to use the White Emperor's name to put a halt to this matter, or at least buy some time.

Under countless gazes, the Xiang clan leader opened his eyes and slowly stood.

A great mountain seemed to appear within the stone hall.

In this dim environment, the Xiang clan leader's eyes were

incredibly bright.

His eyes carried with them the vicissitudes of time, a courage that feared nothing, and an intelligence that could see through all matters of this world.

Upon seeing these two eyes, many of the opposition, including the Bear tribe leader, felt greatly relieved.

But in the next moment, they heard something completely unexpected.

"I feel that this matter seems that it might be okay."

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'Seems'.

'Might'.

These were very ambiguous words.

The Xiang clan leader's stance sounded rather ambiguous.

But in the current situation, that he chose this kind of words was the clearest possible stance!

The hall once more fell silent, the mood extremely oppressive.

The leaders of several small tribes even appeared afraid.

The Shi clan leader stared into the Xiang clan leader's eyes and said, "So it turns out that you really did have a relationship with Xuelao City."

He had expected to see this sight, but now that it had really taken place, he still found it difficult to suppress his shock.

Because there was no reason he could think of for the Xiang clan leader to stand on the Empress's side and support the alliance with Xuelao City.

The Xiang clan leader impassively replied, "You are wrong. All

this complies with His Majesty's will."

Upon hearing this, the Shi clan leader slightly creased his brow. He seemed to want to say something more, but in the end, he said no more.

Those tribal leaders who furiously opposed the alliance with the demons, those generals who were already gripping the hilts of their blades, were all dumbstruck.

This was His Majesty's will?

The White Emperor clan had far too special a status along the two shores of the Red River. It was not just a matter of simple influence. Along with its considerable strength, it had a prestige that reached to the dome of the night sky and a status akin to that of gods.

No one dared to reveal the slightest disrespect to the White Emperor's name, let alone oppose it.

Madam Mu also had an extremely high prestige, but those tribal leaders and generals had been compelled by their anxiety into taking their blades and axes and filling the hall with their shouts of opposition.

If the White Emperor were here, would they dare do the same?

They would not.

Even if the Xiang clan leader was only communicating the White Emperor's will...

Still no one would dare to voice their opposition.

Even if those tribal leaders and generals still could not make the turn, they were still bursting with unwillingness, even shame.

But everything had its exception.

Today, the Demi-human race faced its most important turning point in the last one thousand years.

So for a few unexpected things to occur was only right.

After so many years, the majesty of the White Emperor finally received its first challenge.

The Bear tribe leader stood and stared into the Xiang clan leader's eyes as he asked, "Why?"

He was not asking about why the Xiang clan leader stood with the Empress, because the reason had already been given: this was His Majesty's will.

The Bear tribe leader was asking, why had His Majesty agreed to the alliance with the demons?

At any other time, for any other matter, just this one word would have ended with him being sent into the Celestial Tree to have his body burned to ashes by the Wildfire.

Today, it would not, because many demi-human personages thought the same and wanted to know the answer.

"This alliance has nothing to do with gain. It is only a method for the weak to contend against the strong. A thousand years ago, the Demon race was at its prime, wreaking havoc across the continent. For my race to survive, we could only ally with the Human race. But power easily shifts as time passes, and now the Human race has grown strong, their ambitions flourishing along with their strength. The ally of my race naturally has to change as well."

This grand event certain to change the history of the continent seemed very casual and ordinary in Madam Mu's flat and emotionless voice, making it seem all the more matter-of-fact.

The demi-human personages within the stone hall silently pondered these words. They realized that though this statement was simple and crude, its reasoning was incredibly hard to overturn.

"So we must make old enemies allies and aim our weapons at former comrades?"

The Bear tribe elder was silent for a while, then shook his head. "I cannot do it."

On the battlefields of the snowy plains, he had fought alongside Xue He and other Divine Generals of the Great Zhou. They had developed an excellent rapport, developing friendships on the battlefield in which they were willing to die together. He found it impossible to imagine that a day would come in which he would need to lead an army to fight those fellows, where they would have to massacre each other.

Madam Mu answered, "Such is history, monotonous and tedious, even ugly at times, but only this way can history continuously push forward. By no means will it be so dismal as the end of the country and the extermination of the race, but if the demons are destroyed, it will be our turn. You are all great demi-humans of extraordinary wisdom, so how can you not understand this point?"

The Shi clan leader suddenly said, "Is this way of thinking not overestimating the strength of the Human race?"

Madam Mu's gaze fell upon the great demi-human who represented the strongest faction of the southern lands and asked, "What do you want to say?"

The Shi clan leader explained, "Even if the venerable Daoist Shang Xingzhou has the ambition to unite the continent, everyone knows that he is the executor of Emperor Taizong's final wish, so how could he overturn the pact Emperor Taizong established with us? More importantly, he first has to resolve the internal problems of the Human race. I do not believe he will be able to survive to that day."

The Deer tribe Grand Duke arched his brows and asked, "Do you really think that the Li Palace will win?"

The Shi clan leader said, "At the very least, I cannot say that the Li Palace will lose."

The Grand Duke jeered, "Even if the Li Palace wins, will the ambitions of the Human race fade away?"

The Shi clan leader calmly returned, "His Holiness the Pope has always had a good relationship with my race, and he certainly does not have the ambitions of his teacher."

"Let us not speak about whether Shang Xingzhou might lose, and we do not need to think about His Holiness's stance towards my race. I only wish to remind everyone."

The Grand Duke coldly said, "If they have just been acting these last few years, what then?"

The mood in the stone hall shifted once more.

'A temple of Xining rules the world.' This saying had already spread across the entire continent.

The Grand Duke's words were also on the mind of many other important individuals. This was because whether it was in White Emperor City or Xuelao City or even in the human capital or the sects of the south, countless people could not understand why the relationship between Shang Xingzhou and Chen Changsheng, this master and disciple, had reached this point.

At this moment, Madam Mu spoke of a very important matter.

"Wang Zhice is still alive."

Chapter 976 – In the Heavens Is a Capital of White Jade

Wang Zhice was a true celebrity of the continent.

Amongst the demi-humans, he was probably the most famous human.

In the northern expeditions against the demons, he was the vice commander of the combined human and demi-human armies, but in reality, he was the highest commander.

When they were small, the tribal leaders and generals had heard their elders recall his deeds countless times.

Wang Zhice's deeds from back then had already made him a legend of the generation, inspiring endless awe and reverence in them.

However, the word 'awe' was a word that combined both respect and fear.

Only in death could one be a legend. If alive, they were pressure, because, in the end, Wang Zhice was a human.

It was hard for the personages present to believe the Deer tribe Grand Duke's claim that Shang Xingzhou and Chen Changsheng might be acting. If this was a trap, it was far too complicated, involving too many parts. Even the coup of the Mausoleum of Books was nothing but a part of this trap. Who could construct such a heaven-shaking scheme? Not even someone as strong as Shang Xingzhou could do it.

But Wang Zhice was still alive.

If he had laid down this trap for the sake of the Human race, what then?

The stifling and tense air in the hall made the Bear tribe leader somewhat irritated. He sternly said, "If the Human race is so

strong as all of you say, their schemes so terrifying, then have you ever imagined what sort of attack we would suffer once we broke the alliance?"

The Deer tribe Grand Duke sneered, "As long as our alliance with Xuelao City becomes reality, the humans can get as angry as they want, but what will they be able to do? At most, they will issue a few imperial edicts severely reprimanding us, unless they're really courageous enough to attack both us and Xuelao City at the same time?"

Madam Mu expressionlessly said, "War requires courage, but starting one has nothing to do with it. That is dictated by the situation. I do not like war, so today, I am suggesting a way to avoid plunging the continent into the flames of war. This is the reason for my decision to ally with Xuelao City."

These words caused the hall to fall even more silent. Those tribal leaders and generals who initially opposed the alliance had begun to waver.

The Shi clan leader narrowed his eyes even further, making it hard to tell if they were like golden willows or slender blades.

He knew that in the current circumstances, it would be incredibly difficult to change the situation, but when he recalled his conversation with Xiaode from last night, he felt like he could only persist.

"I have already seen Xuelao City's sincerity."

He raised his head to Madam Mu and asked, "But how can the demons trust in our sincerity? A treaty of alliance with no trust has little meaning in my view."

Madam Mu calmly gazed back and replied, "I believe that you should have understood well the intent of the Heavenly Selection ceremony."

The Shi clan leader's expression remained unchanged as he

replied, "Must we truly marry Princess Luoluo off to this young Demon Lord? Must we call a demon His Majesty?"

This was his, as well as the tribal leaders and generals', most pointed criticism.

If the Demon Lord was allowed to marry Princess Luoluo, would that not mean that once the White Emperor returned to the sea of stars, the Demon Lord would become Emperor of the Demi-humans?

Madam Mu calmly gazed at the Shi clan leader and answered, "A marriage alliance does not mean that the inheritance of the throne is involved."

A marriage alliance between two Imperial clans had always been the simplest and most effective way of forming an alliance.

This sort of matter had happened countless times in the past. Many demi-human princesses had once been married off to Xuelao City.

The tribal leaders, generals, and ministers in the hall found the matter of a marriage alliance more acceptable, but Madam Mu's words had still not resolved the most crucial issue.

The whole world knew that it was difficult for the White Emperor and Madam Mu to have children. After so many years, they only had Luoluo, a daughter.

If the princess was married to the distant Xuelao City and the Demon Lord, who was the ultimate victor in the Heavenly Selection ceremony, would not inherit the throne, then who would be the next White Emperor?

Madam Mu's hand lightly caressed her belly as she said, "It will naturally be my and His Majesty's son."

When she said this, her expression did not change. It was still cold and lofty, but now imbued with a divine majesty.

The Xiang clan leader intoned with a solemn expression, "Congratulations, Your Majesty. Congratulations, Empress."

This sudden news had so stunned the demi-human personages that they could not speak. Only now did these words prompt them from their stupor, and they began to bow and give their blessings and praise.

The Shi clan leader once more recalled his conversation with Xiaode. He could not help but sigh as he thought, I have already done all I can, but is it still not enough to alter the ending?

The Xiang clan leader turned to the people within the hall and asked, "Does anyone have anything else they wish to say?"

The Bear tribe leader gripped his metal staff, his hands trembling, and slammed it against the ground.

With a thud, the earth quaked and dust plumed.

His eyes turned red as he stared at Madam Mu. "I have nothing to say, but I still object."

The Shi clan leader silently thought for a few moments, then said, "I also object."

Soon after, a general of the He clan famed for his bravery took off his helmet and impassively declared, "I object."

The demi-human Prime Minister, who had remained silent ever since the preparations for the Heavenly Selection had begun, stood up and said in his timeworn voice, "I will only agree once I personally meet His Majesty."

"I also object."

"I as well!"

The Xiang clan leader remained unmoving as these cries rose and fell.

Madam Mu slightly raised her brows, her starry eyes devoid of emotion.

She was somewhat surprised that there were still so many voices of opposition.

But this did not matter.

This was a decree issued by both her and His Majesty.

Moreover, this decree had gained the support of the Xiang clan leader, who led the Council of Elders.

How could some random noise stop the surging great river from flowing west?

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The court debate concluded. Almost forty percent of the gathered tribal leaders, ministers, and generals had objected to the demon alliance, but the decree was sent down nonetheless.

A Grand Scholar of the Abyssal Pearl Pavilion who had attended the Grand Examination in the capital one hundred years ago was nervously writing out the formal decree.

The demi-human personages who had debated in the oppressive atmosphere for a long time walked out of the stone hall to rest for a while.

And then, they saw the young Demon Lord.

The sky was a clear blue, the edge of the platform a thin line. He stood beneath the lonely figure of the pear tree.

He had already taken off the tattered bamboo hat. It sat by his feet, almost buried under the white pear blossoms.

His face was handsome, white as jade. His robes rustled in the wind as if about to take flight.

With this scene and this person, nothing could be more beautiful.

A general stared at him with a murderous gaze, as if he would charge over at any moment.

A tribal leader warily stared at him, as if he would turn and leave at any moment.

A minister forced a smile and looked towards him, as if he would get on his knees and bow at any moment.

Regardless of what sort of emotions they felt, they all had to admit that the young Demon Lord was truly an extraordinary individual.

A Demon Lord standing alone in the Imperial City of the Demi-human race while still so calm and indifferent truly inspired admiration.

Ritual music came from Whalefall Platform down below.

The mood over the observation platform instantly became dignified.

The decree had been finished.

The Heavenly Selection, the marriage alliance and the treaty were about to be formally proclaimed.

Proclaimed to the world.

At this moment, the ritual music suddenly became a little disordered.

Perhaps it was because of those footsteps.

Several dozen palace maids and attendants arrived at the observation platform.

They were led by Luoluo.

She gazed at the Demon Lord beneath the pear tree.

The Demon Lord gazed at her.

1. This line is from the longest poem written by Li Bai, which has the long Chinese title of '经乱离后天恩流夜郎忆旧游书怀赠江夏韦太守良宰'. The poem begins with Li Bai imagining himself ascending to

the heavens, to the capital of white jade where the Celestial Emperor resides, where Li Bai is blessed with immortality.

Chapter 977 – The Person in the Painting

The sky was clear of clouds as far as the eye could see, but the sunlight was not at all scorching. Even on the warm banks of the Red River, it was still midwinter. A chilly breeze swept across the stone platform, not stirring the dust in the seams, only causing the piled white flowers to tremble, making them seem all the more melancholy.

Luoluo stood outside the world of pear blossoms, her figure somewhat lonely.

She was still child-like. No clear emotions could be seen on her beautiful face. However, when they thought about the decision made in the stone hall, the renewed ritual music from Whalefall Platform, and the decree that was about to be announced to the world, many generals and tribal leaders found it difficult to face her. They lowered their heads or turned around so as to avoid her gaze.

Luoluo apparently did not notice these things. She walked forward, her small leather shoes making no sound as they stepped on the soft white flowers.

While still a distance from the pear tree, she stopped. A figure as towering as a great mountain had blocked her path.

She raised her head and realized that it was the Chief Elder who had doted on her since she was a child.

The Xiang clan leader looked at her, saying nothing, but all sorts of complicated emotions appeared in his eyes. Just like those wrinkles at the corner of his eyes, they were very difficult to understand.

In his calm eyes lay warmth, affection, apology, and begging.

Luoluo understood what he meant and gently said, "I did not expect it."

The apology in the Xiang clan leader's eyes increased as he said, "This is His Majesty's will."

Her petite face staring at him, Luoluo calmly replied, "And so what?"

The observation platform had been very quiet, especially after she had appeared.

Although her voice was soft, it rang out in the ears of all the demi-human personages.

The Xiang clan leader froze, as did the Deer tribe Grand Duke, the Carp tribe leader, and everyone else on the observation platform.

Because they had not expected that their forever-cute, cautious, and obedient princess could say such words.

'And so what?' These three simple words seemed like a simple question, but how could they not hear the cold indifference and unswerving resolve?

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Luoluo walked to the pear tree.

She looked at the young demon and realized that he really was quite handsome and the aura he exuded did not annoy her very much.

Her gaze fell on his hair. Upon confirming that there were no horns, she felt a little interested and then somewhat confused.

As the most noble Princess of the Demi-humans, whether in the capital or in White Emperor City, she had always been under the tightest guard. As a result, she had not been allowed to properly take part in the Grand Examination, was not allowed to enter the Mausoleum of Books to view the monoliths with others, and she had certainly not been permitted to train herself in the Garden of Zhou.

So she had not had a chance to meet a true demon.

There was only that one time, many years ago, in the Orthodox Academy, on that unforgettable night.

The demon with horns had ended up in Zhou Tong's hands, so he was probably long dead, right?

At the time, he had not even succeeded at Purification, yet he still stood in front of her. Was he not afraid?

A white flower dropped from its branch and brushed past her hair, waking her from her daze.

She curiously asked, "You are the Demon Lord?"

Her eyes were as clear and bright as the waters of a stream. In them, one could see all true emotions.

It was clear that she held no anger towards the young Demon Lord, only curiosity.

"Yes."

The Demon Lord calmly looked back and suddenly added, "You can call me by my name, Nero."

There seemed nothing special about the brief pause between these statements.

But if Black Robe or the Demon Commander were present, they would undoubtedly be flabbergasted.

If those aristocrats and ministers in Xuelao City were present, they might have even fallen unconscious from the shock.

Although an authentic pride had been concealed in his indifferent tone, he had told her his true name and had even permitted her to use it.

Luoluo was unaware of these rules of the Demon Imperial clan, and did not care.

She asked him, "You want to marry me?"

The Demon Lord slightly raised his brow and replied, "Correct."

Luoluo asked, "Why?"

The goal of the marriage alliance was naturally to seal the alliance between the two races.

This was the obvious answer, and the Demon Lord believed that she knew it, but he could not give this answer.

This was about the majesty of a sovereign, of the aloof manner of the Imperial clan, and about his respect toward the other side.

So his answer was still love.

He said that he had loved her for a long time.

Luoluo naturally knew that this wasn't true, just like she knew the real reason he wanted to marry her.

But she still asked, "So you knew about me before?"

Many of these influential figures, including the Xiang clan leader, felt like they knew why she persisted in her questions.

She wanted to prove that the Demon Lord was lying.

She wanted to prove that the Demon Lord had no knowledge of her, so he naturally could not have loved her.

But what was the meaning in proving this?

In their view, Princess Luoluo was acting like a little child, nibbling on the end of her brush as she racked her brains on the solution to a problem.

Even if she did find the solution, who would care about whether it was right or wrong?

"Of course, it's because I knew of you that I admired you. I believe that a day will come when you will think the same."

The Demon Lord calmly gazed at her, brimming with confidence.

Luoluo suddenly took several steps back, standing outside the

white flowers before looking back at the tree.

She tilted her head, her brows furrowing as if vexed by something. She looked very cute.

Before her eyes was a painting.

Beyond the railing was the blue sky, high, calm and clear.

A pear tree, blossoming with tiny white flowers.

He stood under the tree.

The wind stirred, the flowers falling like rain.

They fell on his shoulders.

They fell on his clothes.

This was truly a beautiful painting.

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The Demon Lord said nothing, allowing her to stare.

Because he was standing in the painting.

A smile so faint that it teetered on the edge of existence rested on his face. A hint of fatigue and annoyance gradually appeared in his eyes.

Luoluo had drawn his interest at the start, as she had not shown fear like the noble ladies of Xuelao City, nor did she feign arrogance like his sisters. Like an ordinary girl, she viewed him with bright eyes and expressed her curiosity.

But as time passed, his interest faded.

Especially when he saw Luoluo's current expression.

This painting was one he had painted for her.

He mentally jeered, girls are girls. In the end, they still like these empty and laughable things.

As he thought this, he heard a question.

"You saw my painting?"

It was Luoluo.

The Demon Lord's smile faded as he calmly returned, "I do not understand your meaning."

"Three days ago, I made a painting."

Luoluo looked at him and said, "I didn't expect to see it realized today."

The Demon Lord slightly perked his brows. "Is that so? That's truly a coincidence."

"Of course, this is not a coincidence. Mother knew that I loved that painting, so she let you see it. A spring wind comes in the depths of winter, a pear tree full of blossoming flowers, and you standing beneath it... these details are really quite excellent. The pear blossoms are beautiful, as are you, and the scene is very natural, but Mother and you got something wrong."

"What did we get wrong?"

"Even if everything is perfectly set up, you can never be the person in my painting."

"Why?"

"Because I did not conjure that painting from my imagination. It was based on an existing scene."

Luoluo gave him a sympathetic gaze, like she was looking at a child nibbling at his brush as he racked his brains for the solution to a problem.

All of you believed that you had found the correct solution, but none of you understood the meaning of the question.

The Demon Lord had an inkling as to the answer. "Who is the person in the painting?"

Luoluo opened her eyes wide and seriously replied, "Of course, it's my teacher."

Chapter 978 – The Rivers and Mountains Are Truly Like a Painting

In the last five years, Luoluo had only received a very small number of letters.

There was no place she could put her memories, and her concerns could only be known to herself. Fortunately, she had lived for a long period of time in the Li Palace, had been under Mao Qiuyu's formal tutelage, and also had somewhat of a friendship with Archbishop An Lin. As a result, she was able to learn a good deal of news concerning Chen Changsheng.

And after Chen Changsheng left the snowy mountain and reappeared in society, An Lin often wrote her letters.

She knew everything that had happened in the last few days.

She knew what he had done in the Mount Song Army headquarters, knew that he had passed through Hanqiu City, knew that he had gone to Wenshui, and knew that he had killed Daoist Baishi in front of the Daoist church.

A pear tree was planted behind the holy gate of Wenshui's Daoist church. On one winter night, deep in the winter, Wenshui welcomed a sudden spring breeze, causing the tree to bloom with flowers.

The cool breeze swept past, causing countless tiny white flowers to drop down and fall on his shoulder, as clean as fresh snow.

An Lin had described this scene in her letter.

Luoluo liked it, so she had diligently painted it, upon which she found that she liked it even more.

Madam Mu did not know that such a scene truly had taken place in Wenshui's Daoist church, so she naturally did not know why her daughter loved this painting so.

After some pondering, she concluded that her daughter was just feeling a little romantic with the coming of the Heavenly Selection ceremony.

Even in midwinter, White Emperor City was still warm. It would not be too fantastical for the pear tree on the observation platform to suddenly bloom.

Thus, a spring breeze swept across the shores of the Red River, causing the branches to burst with white flowers. And so the Demon Lord had climbed the steps to the Imperial City and stood under the pear tree, remaining there until now.

All this for a painting.

Just like Luoluo had said, this was truly a beautiful painting, whether it was the blossoming pear tree or the Demon Lord himself.

Madam Mu's arrangements had truly been meticulous, her methods extraordinary.

Regretfully, she had still failed to make the Demon Lord the person in the painting.

Because Luoluo's painting already had a person, a person that was impossible to replace.

"You can paint a new painting with whatever scene you please."

The Demon Lord faintly smiled at Luoluo.

It had to be said that even now, his manners were perfect, without the slightest flaw.

'Whatever scene you like, I can become a part of it.'

This was a very touching statement of love.

Alas, it still failed to move Luoluo.

She replied, "My apologies. All the scenes I like do not include you."

The Demon Lord arched his brow. "But they must include him?"

Luoluo answered, "I love the spring breeze, the fresh snow. Teacher is the fresh snow, the spring breeze, but you are not."

The Demon Lord's inky brows rose higher and higher, a chilly aura rising as he asked, "Why?"

Luoluo replied, "Fresh snow and the spring breeze are the cleanest of all. Teacher is precisely this sort of person."

A deathly stillness settled over the observation platform.

The meaning of these words was exceptionally clear.

The Demon Lord laughed at himself and shook his head.

There was no joy in his eyes, only an icy cold.

So-called scenery had always depended on the mind of the person viewing the scene.

The person in the painting was naturally the person in the mind.

If he continued to entangle himself in this conversation, he would end up losing some face.

He was the master of the demon lands, one of the most revered Divine race. How could he endure such humiliation?

"So what Xuanyuan Po said was true—you had a secret relationship with Chen Changsheng."

His lip curled with derision as he said, "You are his student and he dares to make moves on you? How could such a person be called clean?"

"You are wrong again. I truly do love Teacher, but Teacher has always treated me as a student, so what wrongs has he committed?"

The observation platform remained quiet, with only Luoluo's voice to be heard.

Her words were for the Demon Lord, for the surrounding demi-

human personages, and for the entire continent.

Her hands were tightly clenched as she said this, her voice shaking, but there was no shame in her voice, only a strong resolve.

The Demon Lord impassively said, "To actually love your own teacher, do you know the meaning of shame?"

Luoluo stared into his eyes and said, "You killed your father and all your brothers. Do you have the right to teach me the meaning of shame?"

The Demon Lord remained expressionless, but the flames of rage had already begun to burn.

He realized that the girl in front of him had a strange, but real charm.

Every word she said was spoken with absolute sincerity that compelled trust—even when she was attacking.

It was also this sincerity that incurred his rage.

No one other than Luoluo could see what the Demon Lord was truly feeling at this moment.

She very earnestly and curiously asked, "You want to kill me?"

The Demon Lord froze, once more discovering a special trait of this girl.

She seemed able to clearly perceive the emotions of the people at her side no matter how well they were concealed.

Of course, her curiosity was also real. She wished to know whether the Demon Lord really did dare to kill her.

Luoluo's question prompted the generals and guards around the observation platform to aim their wary gazes at the pair.

The Xiang clan leader's gaze seemed to have become countless times heavier as it descended upon the Demon Lord.

This was White Emperor City, and not even the Demon Lord was allowed to treat her poorly.

And besides, the Demon Lord had once more grown interested in her.

"You spoke correctly. This scenery and painting were your mother's design."

The Demon Lord continued, "It can be seen that she did not want you to be too sad, so she hoped to marry you to a man that you loved."

Luoluo replied, "I can see that you don't love me."

The Demon Lord agreed. "Correct. My willingness to cooperate was out of respect for you."

Luoluo said, "I like this sort of frank conversation."

The Demon Lord replied, "I also do not like those empty and deceptive things, so I hope that you can understand, you will marry me. This point cannot be changed."

Luoluo's voice was somewhat soft. "Just for the alliance?"

The Demon Lord's voice was very calm and indifferent. "Chen Changsheng stole away the woman I fancied, so for me, taking you back to Xuelao City counts as a minor revenge."

Luoluo helplessly sighed. "If you have the skill, go to South Stream Temple and steal away Teacher's wife. To say these words and do these things is really not in accordance with your status."

"Then let us speak of what we should be talking about."

The Demon Lord walked up to the rail, looking down at the streets of White Emperor City and the mountains on the other side of the Red River. "In a little while, your decree will be announced to the world. At the same time, my divine decree will leave Xuelao City to be spread all over the continent. In at most four hours, the Cong Province Army headquarters will begin to marshal its troops,

and then an order will arrive at Blue Pass. Before tonight, the Mount Song Army will send a transfer order to Sloping Cliff. Within three days at maximum, the Human race will gather an army of millions, arrayed before ten-some mighty passes, ready to begin a great war."

If a normal person said these words, they would not hold much weight. It would be like someone lightly narrating history.

But since these words came from his mouth, they had a completely different feeling.

Because he was the Demon Lord, ruling the vast snowy plains of the continent, whom countless powerful demon warriors had sworn to follow to the death.

Luoluo knew that these words were highly likely to become true, and her small face paled.

"But this war will not begin, because the humans will not dare to start it."

The Demon Lord continued, "The story between Shang Xingzhou and Chen Changsheng has not been made clear, and more importantly, they do not have the experience, so they do not have the courage."

By 'experience', he referred to the fact that the Human race was not experienced in fighting both the Demi-human and Demon races at the same time.

Even before Emperor Taizong's era, even if one looked back tens of thousands of years and even further back in history, the Human race had never experienced such a thing.

The Demon Lord said, "As long as you marry me, there will be no war, and because of you, several million beings will continue living on this continent."

Luoluo gazed at his back, silently thinking for a long time. Finally, she softly asked, "Are you threatening me?"

"No, I am speaking of the scenery."

The Demon Lord gazed at the distant mountains and said, "For people like you, me, and Chen Changsheng, the only scenery that is worthy of our eyes is the rivers and mountains. If you only want to see the scenery with him, then these rivers and mountains as beautiful as a painting will be burned to ash by the fires of war. This is truly a bit too selfish."

Chapter 979 – Hearing Your Voice

After hearing the Demon Lord's words, Luoluo walked to the edge of the observation platform and quietly pondered this question.

The damp winds from the Red River shifted about the warm mists on White Emperor City's streets, refreshing the people within.

She remembered that she had once discussed a similar question with her teacher in the Orthodox Academy, but she had forgotten what her teacher had said.

How should she choose?

At this moment, the ritual music from Whalefall Platform suddenly stopped. Several furious strands of Qi soared to the heavens, and then she sensed fierce quaking.

A battle had suddenly occurred within the Beast Guard in charge of guarding the Imperial City and been quickly suppressed.

The little flowers on the ground trembled. The distant stone steps were dyed red and she could make out several Beast Guards being dragged away, though it was not possible to see whether they were dead or alive.

Before these Beast Guards had been suppressed, they had shouted a few words that Luoluo had heard loud and clear.

"Her Highness cannot be married!" They were willing to die in order to give voice to these words.

Luoluo turned to the Demon Lord and said, "I will not marry you."

The Demon Lord asked, "Just because of these foolish and loyal guards?"

Luoluo explained, "It has some relation, but the more important

reason is that I do not like you, so how can I marry you?"

The Demon Lord considered this response, then answered, "These words are very reasonable. I cannot find any words to refute them."

Luoluo noted, "But they won't make you back off."

"Correct. I will still marry you, even if you don't love me. Because marriage, especially the marriage between you and me, is related to the rivers and mountains as beautiful as a painting, is related to the peace of the continent. It is related to many things, but it is only with regards to love that it has no relationship."

The Demon Lord calmly gazed at her and added, "In addition, the day we are married, I will kill Xuanyuan Po as a present to you."

Luoluo's complexion paled.

If this marriage alliance could not be broken, he would not need to personally act, only make a request, and Xuanyuan Po would die.

Because this was the sincerity that the Demon race had the right to demand from White Emperor City.

Although Xuanyuan Po was a member of the Bear tribe, his more important identity was that of a student of the Orthodox Academy.

If the demi-humans killed Xuanyuan Po, then with Chen Changsheng's personality, there would be no means to reconcile the two sides.

The demons could bring up even more conditions, like a massacre in the Great Zhou embassy and the Daoist Church of the Western Wastes. They could also make it impossible for the humans and demi-humans to ever be at peace, but if this was done, the situation on the continent would rapidly deteriorate, which was something neither the demons nor demi-humans were willing to see.

In this aspect, the Demon Lord was not lying. He truly did hope for peace.

At least until he and his race could regain their strength.

The blood on the steps was quickly cleaned up by the laborers and palace maids.

The ritual music started up again from Whalefall Platform.

Several Grand Scholars of the Demi-human Court and important ministers of the various pavilions split into two lines and walked out of the hall.

The bright yellow edict was placed on a cinnabar plate and then was taken with both hands by the highest-ranked official in the Imperial City.

Madam Mu walked up to Luoluo, her expression solemn. Just like the images of ocean spray woven in black and gold on her robes, she was gorgeous and majestic.

Luoluo said, "Mother."

Madam Mu said, "My daughter is about to married. I truly am rather reluctant."

When she said this, her expression was very calm, both a sign of her resolve and that she would not tolerate refusal.

"I will not marry."

Luoluo's voice was also very calm, a sign of her resolve and that she would not accept.

Madam Mu looked at her and said, "You should be well aware that the ancestral spirits accepted him yesterday."

Luoluo replied, "The ancestral spirits accepted him, but I will not, because the person being married off is me, not the ancestral spirits."

Madam Mu asked, "Even if he is Heaven's Chosen?"

Luoluo replied, "The one the heavens chose is not the one that I choose, so there is no meaning to it."

Madam Mu gazed at the gradually dispersing mists on the street and slowly said, "If you persist in not accepting this marriage, it will be very difficult to proceed with the alliance between the two races. Let us not speak of how many of the continent's people will die in the future. Right now, the Demi-human race will most likely fracture. Of the lives in this city, how many people will no longer be able to see the Celestial Trees?"

Luoluo fell quiet for a while, then said, "Mother, in the end, you still do not consider this place your home."

Madam Mu asked, "Why do you insist on this belief?"

Luoluo replied, "Because you have no affection for this city. You can use the lives in this city to threaten your own daughter."

A hint of deep exhaustion appeared in Madam Mu's eyes. "You have spoken correctly. I truly do not like this place, because this place is full of the stench of fur and sweat, full of filthy words, full of that stupid courage and that loathsome thing called heroism. This place is like a vast desert, savage and primitive."

Her voice was so soft that nobody else could hear.

"Xuelao City is different. That place has true history, culture, and most importantly, art. Even though it is far inferior to the capital, the husband that I have chosen for you is the most outstanding successor of this civilization. I do not wish for you to walk my old path, so be married off."

Madam Mu softly said, "The matter has already been decided. Since you cannot object, you can only learn how to accept."

Luoluo was quiet for a while, then asked, "Why can I not object?"

Madam Mu looked into her eyes and said, "This is a marriage arranged for you by me and your royal father with the ancestral spirits serving as matchmaker. Who can object?"

Yes, marriage had never had anything to do with love.

It was based on the orders of the parents and the words of the matchmaker.

Whether it was in the Demi-human race, the Human race, or the Demon race, this was the case for the entire continent.

Who could still object to this marriage?

Luoluo recalled the scene many years ago in the capital, during the Ivy Festival.

She had thought of this scene countless times, so even now, that scene was as vivid as if it was taking place right in front of her.

In her memories, this was her teacher's most glorious moment.

Not even her teacher's taking the first rank of the first banner in the Grand Examination or drawing down a night of starlight in the Mausoleum of Books could match the glory of that moment.

Because her teacher, back then, had only been an ordinary student of the Orthodox Academy.

More importantly, at that time, her teacher was her teacher alone.

Alas, not one sliver of her teacher's glory on that night could fall upon her.

Because those words had not been for her.

If she could just hear those words right now, it would be fine.

Alas, this was impossible.

She had heard that her teacher was currently at Mount Li. Even if he had gotten the news and traveled here as quickly as possible, he would still be too late.

Luoluo stood at the railing, gripping the stone pearl tied to her neck, and gazed at the distant mountains on the opposite shore.

She was confident that her teacher was on the other side,

traveling across the mountains, surmounting the peaks.

Perhaps he still had thousands of li to go, but at least he was on the way.

It was fine this way.

She was very satisfied.

Suddenly, her expression changed.

The clouds over the mountains had begun to twist and writhe.

A hole appeared in the clouds.

A pillar of light descended.

This pillar of light was imbued with a divine aura and an inexplicable majesty.

The seal over the two shores of the Red River was instantly pierced by the pillar of light.

A White Crane flew out of the light.

Its clear cry resounded throughout White Emperor City.

With it came another voice.

"I object."

Chapter 980 – The Order of a Teacher Is Difficult to Defy

A White Crane in the heavens.

This sight attracted countless gazes from White Emperor City.

Ten-some gray vultures flew up from the Imperial City to meet it. Yet these fierce birds, famed for being difficult to tame, seemed very timid today. They did not dare approach the White Crane, maintaining a distance of several li.

Countless gazes watched as the White Crane flew through the sky.

In an extremely short time, the White Crane had flown from the mountains on the opposite shore of the Red River to the highest point of the Imperial City, where it descended.

The terrifying monsters of ancient times, like the Monster Bull and the Earth Monkey, had become extremely rare, and immortal birds were an even rarer sight.

The demi-human populace was shocked as they speculated as to the origins of the person on the White Crane's back.

The Archbishop of the Western Wastes led several dozen priests in kneeling on the floor.

Their faces were very respectful, even humble, but their eyes blazed with passion and fervor.

The Tang clan stewards and the cultivators from the south quickly came to their senses. With astonished faces, they prostrated on the ground.

The Great Zhou ambassador felt somewhat conflicted, but he did not hesitate for too long before kneeling along with his subordinates.

Upon seeing this, some demi-humans recalled the White Crane that was currently most renowned on the continent and guessed at the identity of the person on its back.

The chatter in front of the Imperial City suddenly stopped, leaving only silence.

The Demi-human race had been allied to the Human race for a thousand years. With all their interactions, there were also many believers of the Orthodoxy amongst the Demi-human race. These now ecstatically dropped to their knees and began to bow.

Many people still did not know what was happening or about the identity of the person on the White Crane. But they did see the people around them kneeling on the floor and piously kowtowing, so they were infected by this mood and subconsciously kneeled as well.

From the Imperial City to Heavensguard Pavilion, from the stone walls to the grass meadow, countless demi-humans kneeled on the ground like a tide.

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A chilly wind blew.

The white flowers on the gray pavement trembled.

The White Crane slowly folded its wings.

That person stood on the observation platform.

The Divine Staff held in his left hand was still brightly shining with rays of sacred light.

His eyes were even brighter than the light of the Divine Staff.

The air over the observation platform seemed to have frozen as an almost absolute silence reigned.

Countless gazes rested on him, busting with a complex array of

emotions.

There was no one on the continent that did not recognize the White Crane, did not recognize the Divine Staff.

And so, there was naturally no one who would not recognize who he was.

The one riding the White Crane to this place was not a celestial, but a Saint.

The one gripping the Divine Staff was not a god, but the Pope.

From the Prince of Luling's estate to the two shores of the Red River, crossing eighty thousand li through traveling day and night, forcing open the seal, Chen Changsheng had finally arrived.

In this long journey, he could not keep track of how many clouds he had flown through or gusts he had suffered, but his appearance was still clean, his blue Daoist robes not stained with a speck of dust. The only difference was that the topknot that was usually tightly tied was somewhat messy.

Luoluo cutely rubbed her eyes and tilted her head.

She believed that her eyes had seen wrongly, her ears had heard wrongly.

Upon confirming that she was not wrong, she began to smile.

This was the most authentic of smiles, emerging from inside to outside, a flower blooming.

Anyone who saw this smile, no matter their standpoint, would be able to vividly sense her current happiness and joy.

Luoluo ran like the wind toward Chen Changsheng.

Just like everyone had imagined.

But when she was just a few steps from Chen Changsheng, she stopped.

She stopped so hurriedly that her shoe rubbed out a clear print

on the hard stone of the platform.

She lightly lowered her head, her hands clasping together. Her posture was perfect without anything strange.

"I have seen Teacher."

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For one to switch from arrogance to deference inevitably meant that there was something being sought after, because change required a reason.

Luoluo's display naturally had its reasons.

Chen Changsheng knew, so he did not say anything, only looked at her.

It had been a very long time since he had seen her.

Five years.

Perhaps it was because of her blood or because the sea of stars pampered her, but time had left no trace on Luoluo's petite face.

Chen Changsheng felt like he was still seeing that girl from five years ago.

In those five years, he had rarely written her letters, so he believed that she had gradually forgotten about those things of the past.

But time truly had no effect on her.

She had not forgotten.

Of course, neither had he.

He was now the Pope, as well as the Principal of the Orthodox Academy. He had many students, and many ardent believers like An Hua.

But in terms of true students, he only had one.

And she was his earliest follower, when he was just a young Daoist priest that nobody knew about.

When he thought of these things, a faint smile appeared on Chen Changsheng's face, like a wisp of spring wind.

His voice was also like the spring breeze. Although it was not deliberately moving, it easily got close and intimate, lingering and never leaving.

"Rise."

Luoluo stood up.

She had always been the most obedient to him.

Chen Changsheng had always spoiled her the most.

This gave rise to his second command.

"Come here."

Luoluo walked up to him.

She stood behind him.

Just like that first night in the Orthodox Academy.

When that demon assassin was trying to kill her, Chen Changsheng stood in front of her.

It was also like the first night of the Ivy Festival.

When the Education Overseer of the Heavenly Dao Academy was prepared to attack her, Chen Changsheng had pulled her behind him.

Luoluo stared at Chen Changsheng's back, deciding that her royal father really had spoken the truth.

'When the sky is falling, there will be someone tall to hold it up for you.'

Teacher has always been taller than me.

Her gaze fell on Chen Changsheng's clothes. She thought about a

scene that Archbishop An Lin had described in her letter and was suddenly taken by an impulse.

That demon princess can grab it, so why can't I?

But in the end, she did not reach out, as she proudly thought to herself, I'm Teacher's student. I don't need to prove it to anybody.

She ceased to think about the past, ceased to think about the present.

The order of her parents, the marriage with the Demon Lord—she no longer needed to ponder these things.

She knew that her teacher would help her handle them.

At this moment, all she needed to do was attentively stare at Chen Changsheng.

And then continuously sigh.

Teacher's back really is nice to look at.

Teacher still smells just as fine.

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Many people were looking at Chen Changsheng.

Just like Luoluo.

Chen Changsheng ignored these gazes.

He was looking at Madam Mu.

Madam Mu fell quiet for a while, then asked, "Your Holiness has come to preside over the ceremony?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "As I said, I object."

Madam Mu indifferently said, "Does your objection have any meaning?"

Chen Changsheng answered, "If I do not permit her to marry, she cannot be married."

A voice came from nearby.

"And why is that?"

Chen Changsheng did not look at the questioner as he calmly answered, "Because I am her teacher."

The observation platform was quiet.

The rustling of the pear blossoms in the wind thundered in the ears of the crowd.

Madam Mu had earlier justified the marriage as being the orders of the parent and the words of the matchmaker.

The marriage between Luoluo and the Demon Lord had been decided by her and the White Emperor, and been agreed to by the ancestral spirits of the Demi-human race. Who else could object?

Logically speaking, there was no one else with the right to object.

Fortunately, Luoluo had a teacher.

The entire continent knew of this matter.

The heavens and earth, the sovereign, the parents, the teacher.

A teacher for a day, a father for a lifetime.

He had every right to oppose this marriage.

Luoluo peered out from behind his back and said, "Ah, everyone's heard it clearly. I can't do anything about it. It's difficult to defy the orders of the teacher."

As she said this, she opened her eyes wide, appearing particularly cute and innocent.

Chapter 981 – Who Else Is There?

Luoluo's appearance was so cute that even she felt rather embarrassed, causing her to laugh.

Her laugh was crisp and bright, luoluoluoluo.

In her words just now, she had also used the word '咯'. Though the pronunciations were different, the word was written the same¹.

She had developed this habit as a child.

But once she returned to White Emperor City from the capital, especially most recently, she no longer spoke like this, no longer happily laughed.

She became calm and composed, as if she had truly matured.

Only today, when Chen Changsheng arrived on a crane, did she suddenly transform into the little girl of yesteryear.

This sight and this laughter was soothing to several demi-human personages, but it caused the moods of even more of them to take a downturn.

They knew why Luoluo was so happy. She trusted that Chen Changsheng would involve himself in this matter. This was something that they were absolutely sure of as well.

As the Pope of the Human race, Chen Changsheng would not allow his student to be married off to the Demon Lord, much less stand on the sidelines as the Demi-human race became allies with the Demon race.

What would Madam Mu do next?

A gale abruptly howled out from the mountains behind the Imperial City, smelling of salt and damp.

This was a sea breeze, though it was hard to say if it had come from the distant Great Western Continent.

The pear blossoms scattered about the floor were gradually swept up, beginning to drift about in the room. But they did not fly too far, choosing to linger around in the air.

Both the sea breeze and the pear blossoms' dance had arisen from Madam Mu's deep glance at Chen Changsheng.

It was the deep of darkness, of the abyss, imbued with a chilling aura.

But before Madam Mu could speak or do anything more, another change took place.

The Bear tribe leader and his heavy metal staff stepped forth.

The Shi clan leader stuck his hand in the air to feel the warmth of the sea breeze. Shaking his head, he also stepped forth.

The Prime Minister and ten-some ministers and generals also stepped forth.

They walked out from the crowd around the observation platform, standing out.

Even though they were confronting the majesty and power contained within the sea breeze.

They had chosen their side.

The Prime Minister, the tribal leaders, the ministers, and the generals represented a large proportion of power within the Demi-human race.

They had originally had very close relationships with the humans and been staunchly opposed to the demon alliance.

They had already made their stances known in the hall. The reason they had not persisted, but had remained passive as Luoluo was forced into marriage, was that they knew that with their strength and in unprepared circumstances, it was difficult to face the collective will of Madam Mu and the Council of Elders, much less the White Emperor's will.

But now, Chen Changsheng had arrived.

He was the Pope, qualified to represent the entirety of the Human race.

With the arrival of such a powerful external ally, if they did not take this chance to make their stances known, what right did they have to stand here?

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The sea breeze contained a terrifying will and a clear meaning.

Chen Changsheng clearly perceived it, but he had no intention of retreating.

At this moment, he still did not have a grasp of what exactly had happened, only a rough picture of the general situation.

But he was confident that even if this was the will of the White Emperor and Madam Mu, many factions in the Demi-human race would still be willing to support him, support the Human race.

More importantly, he firmly believed that Madam Mu would not attack him, at least not in front of so many people.

Every matter had a limit.

If the demi-humans wanted to ally with the demons, they could use Xuanyuan Po's death to establish trust between the two sides, but they could not use Chen Changsheng.

His status and identity were different.

If he died in White Emperor City, died at the hands of the demi-humans, a massive wave would assuredly drown out the continent.

No matter how secretly happy his teacher Shang Xingzhou would be, the Great Zhou Imperial Court would still form a grand army to launch a furious assault on the land of the demi-humans, or else the rage of millions of believers would burn the palaces and estates

of the capital to the ground.

As for how intense, perhaps crazed, the Li Palace's reaction would be, one did not even need to think about it to know the answer.

The alliance between the Demi-human and Demon races was for the sake of safety and the future, so how could they pay such a horrifying price?

The sea breeze gradually dissipated, the pure white pear blossoms once more dropping to the ground.

Madam Mu remained serene. She had not struck.

Chen Changsheng had not thought wrongly, except in one aspect.

Madam Mu truly would not personally kill him, but in her eyes, Chen Changsheng was still a dead man.

Because someone else wanted Chen Changsheng dead more than her.

A calm voice spoke.

"The teacher's order is difficult to defy? If the teacher is dead, there naturally won't be any order, so what will the teacher's order be then?"

Chen Changsheng silently turned his eyes to the person beneath the pear tree.

He had met this person before in the snowy mountains and knew of his identity.

The most powerful Demon Lord had come alone to White Emperor City. He knew very well what this meant.

The matter Shang Xingzhou had brought up in the letter truly had become reality.

This was the worst situation.

Chen Changsheng's heart was heavy, but his eyes were indifferent.

The Demon Lord smiled at him and said, "It has been many days since we bid farewell at the snowy mountains. I don't know if you will be able to survive today."

The demi-human experts would not attack Chen Changsheng, but he assuredly would.

The demi-humans could choose, but there was no hope of reconciliation between human and demon. It would probably be another few centuries before even a sliver of a chance would emerge.

The hatred between the Demon and Human races was too deep.

The siege of Luoyang and the northern expedition to exterminate demons had left the cruelest and most indelible marks on the collective psyches of the two races.

Anyone who brought up peace negotiations between the two races, even if they were people of such status as the Demon Lord and Chen Changsheng, would immediately be killed, their body exposed to the elements.

The most loyal of subordinates and followers would abandon them, all believers and subjects would spit on their path.

Shang Xingzhou and the Tang Old Master would have Chen Changsheng exterminated in both body and soul.

The Council of Elders in Xuelao City and the several dozen Demon Generals led by the Demon Commander would rip the Demon Lord from his throne and cast him into the abyss.

So it was said that no peace was possible between the Demon and Human races.

The Demon Lord would undoubtedly kill Chen Changsheng.

The story of that night in the mountains had proved that he had

this sort of capability.

No matter how talented in cultivation he was, Chen Changsheng was still no match.

The Bear tribe leader wanted to step forward, but he was stopped by the Grand Duke from the Deer tribe.

The Xiang clan leader shot a profound glance at the Shi clan leader.

The Red River Beast Guard kept a vigilant eye on everyone.

The situation on the observation platform was somewhat chaotic, the air tense, and a few conflicts appeared here and there.

Madam Mu had an indifferent visage, caring not for these matters.

As it had been for countless years, White Emperor City was still under her control. No one could assist Chen Changsheng.

Even if Chen Changsheng died here, it would have nothing to do with the Demi-human race. Would this not be the most perfect conclusion?

The Demon Lord said to Chen Changsheng, "I'm rather curious to see if Shang Xingzhou will cross tens of thousands of li to save you."

Chen Changsheng pondered this question, then replied, "Given Teacher's style and conduct, probably not."

The Demon Lord gave him a pitiful gaze, then said, "For the youngest Pope of the Human race to die like this truly makes one sigh in sorrow."

Chen Changsheng answered, "There's no need to sigh yet, because since Teacher is not coming, Black Robe and the Demon Commander probably won't be coming either."

There was another level of meaning to these words.

If Black Robe and the Demon Commander came to White Emperor City, Shang Xingzhou would absolutely come, as would the Prince of Xiang, and perhaps even the still-injured Wang Po would come as well.

Both Black Robe and the Demon Commander believed that as long as the opponent was not an expert of the Divine Domain, no one was a match for the Demon Lord, so they definitely would not come.

Arching his brows, the Demon Lord asked, "What do you want to say?"

Chen Changsheng declared, "What I want to say is, then who can stop me from killing you?"

1. Luoluo has a tendency to add the word 咯 to the end of her sentences, a practice which does not translate well into English. 咯 can be pronounced as 'ge' or 'luo'.

Chapter 982 – The Pear Blossom Falls

The Carp tribe leader and the Grand Duke from the Deer tribe glanced at each other, both suddenly a little uneasy.

The Bear tribe leader and the generals ceased their attempts to attack and gazed at the observation platform.

The wrinkles on the Xiang clan leader's forehead seemed to deepen as doubts began to emerge.

Madam Mu calmly gazed at Chen Changsheng, and it was impossible to tell what she was thinking.

No one had any hopes for Chen Changsheng, but just a single sentence from him had caused everyone to change their judgment of the situation.

Because when he said those words, Chen Changsheng had a very calm expression and indifferent voice, both concealing a formidable confidence.

No, he was not even concealing it. This confidence was like his sword, piercing through the clouds with incredible speed and power. Everyone who heard his voice felt their eardrums throb in pain while everyone who saw his face felt like their eyelashes were about to be chopped off.

The Demon Lord could easily tell that there was no false bravado in Chen Changsheng's eyes, only a calm and determined intent to kill.

Black Robe's schemes took into account every possibility, and he had assuredly calculated that Chen Changsheng would immediately venture across tens of thousands of li once he knew of Luoluo's marriage. He had probably also calculated that the demi-humans would choose this moment to temporarily play the bystander. Since he had not made any arrangements, he must have been sure that the Demon Lord could kill Chen Changsheng.

He thought the same.

He did not understand where Chen Changsheng's confidence came from.

As the supreme master of the snowy plains, the Demon Lord was used to having everything under his control.

This sort of feeling that something was seemingly beyond his control caused him many negative emotions.

He waved his sleeve as if shooing away these emotions.

The sleeve stirred up a cool breeze which swept up the pear blossoms and caused them to dance.

This sight caused a burst of muffled gasps to rise from the surrounding crowd.

Flowers being swept up in the wind was a common sight. The reason for these gasps was the strange phenomena taking place.

The pure white pear blossoms had inexplicably turned black, and this was the purest black, without the smallest impurity. Moreover, the orbits of those seemingly soft flowers were bizarre, and they seemed imbued with a great weight.

Black was the absence of light.

All the light falling from the sky seemed to be absorbed by the Demon Lord's sleeve.

This was also the reason the tiny flowers had become so heavy.

The space beneath the pear tree seemed to deform.

What sort of demon technique could produce this sight?

Chen Changsheng calmly stared into the Demon Lord's eyes, paying no attention to the fact that the surroundings had become pitch-black.

In this world of darkness, those identically black flowers seemed to disappear.

Suddenly, an extremely dim smear of white appeared in his vision.

An extremely dim white was gray, like the sudden appearance of the morning sun after journeying in a lightless abyss.

It was a pear blossom, silently floating behind him.

Let alone Chen Changsheng, even the demi-human experts observing this battle had not noticed it.

Chen Changsheng gazed at the Demon Lord, seemingly unaware.

The pear blossom that was gradually turning white suddenly trembled, then shattered.

The pliable petals transformed into countless thin threads that danced in the wind, at times blazing in the light, at times painted black by the darkness.

It was beautiful and bizarre. No one knew just what exactly had happened.

At this moment, the clear and bright cry of a sword rang out over the observation platform.

Fierce sword intent descended, and those petal strands were powerless to resist. One by one, they shattered and dropped to the ground, transforming into black wisps of smoke and vanishing from this world.

A sword bursting with an archaic aura had appeared, quietly floating in the air behind Chen Changsheng.

This sword gave off the feeling that no matter who attacked Chen Changsheng, they would receive its powerful and callous counterattack.

This sword was like Chen Changsheng's most faithful guard, a companion that would never betray him.

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This was the first time many people had seen Chen Changsheng's sword style, this legendary sword style.

Chen Changsheng was still very far from the Divine Domain, but many people believed that his sword style had already surpassed the domain of mortals.

As Su Li's legacy disciple, and considering that Qiushan Jun had been missing these last few years, Chen Changsheng was now publicly acknowledged as a grandmaster of the sword.

Information on his sword style had already been spread around the world, and all the demi-human personages present knew of it. However, seeing it with their own eyes still left them stunned.

The Demon Lord's visage remained unaffected. On that night in the mountains, he had already experienced Chen Changsheng's sword style, so he knew this was far from all of it.

He took a step forward, moving from the darkness to the light, the pear tree behind him about to turn into a silhouette.

The cold darkness howled as it rose, taking up the remaining pear blossoms on the ground and casting them toward Chen Changsheng.

Those pear blossoms did not move quickly, and they could even be described as slow. They gave off a feeling of incredible weight.

Upon seeing this, the demi-human experts experienced a powerful foreboding that if they touched these pear blossoms, they would assuredly be put in a most sorry state.

The problem was that there were several thousand pear blossoms floating in the air. How could Chen Changsheng avoid all of them?

Even if he could avoid them, what would happen to Princess Luoluo standing behind him?

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The Demon Lord knew what Chen Changsheng would do.

Countless swords would surge out of that sword sheath called the Vault Sheath, slicing the thousands of pear blossoms into threads to be swept away in the wind.

The same method he had used to deal with that first pear blossom.

In truth, the Demon Lord was inviting Chen Changsheng to do this.

Because just like every other cultivator on the continent, he was also curious to see just how many swords Chen Changsheng had brought out of the Sword Pool in the Garden of Zhou.

More importantly, after that night in the mountains, he had prepared a method specifically meant for killing Chen Changsheng.

Once the sky of pear blossoms was hacked down by Chen Changsheng's rain of swords, death would descend.

What would happen next would be just as the Demon Lord had imagined, as had the Xiang clan leader and many other experts.

Swords shrilly howled as powerful sword intents ran the breadth from earth to sky. Deep and straight lines were slashed through the hard floor of the observation platform as those floating pear blossoms were cut down, countless terrifying spatial fissures flashing between them.

This sight caused fear to engulf the eyes of many. Let alone the pear blossoms as heavy as mountains or those fierce sword intents, the spatial fissures produced by the clashes of two powerful Qis would be enough to kill the vast majority of those present.

After some time, the pear blossoms had all fallen to the ground, leaving behind no trace except for a faint fragrance.

The frightening spatial fissures gradually closed like some fiend from the abyss closing its eyes.

Several hundred swords floated in the air, a torrential rain on the verge of descending.

In this rain of swords, Chen Changsheng quietly gazed at the Demon Lord.

The pear blossoms had been exhausted, but he was not dead.

Because the Demon Lord's move had not appeared.

The Demon Lord had an expression of unprecedented solemnity, with even a hint of shock.

He stared into Chen Changsheng's eyes and asked, "And what sort of sword style is this?"

Chapter 983 – Sword Domain

Several hundred renowned swords floated in the air, imbued with the boundless pressure of a storm.

This sight and the awe-inspiring sword intent being released caused the crowd around the observation platform to subconsciously back away.

They had finally seen the legendary sword style. The crowd felt shock, then reverence, and finally, confusion.

Because of the Demon Lord's question: "And what sword style is this?"

Had Chen Changsheng not used his legendary sword style? But there was not a single difference between it and the legend.

Only true demi-human experts like the Xiang clan leader could vaguely sense that the several hundred swords floating in the air were somewhat different from the sword style of rumor.

The Demon Lord knew that Chen Changsheng had the ability to hack down the sky of pear blossoms, and this had been exactly what he wanted to see.

Because his true move, his killing blow, was hidden behind the pear blossoms.

The simultaneous strike of a thousand swords was Chen Changsheng's strongest move.

Having different swords exhibit different sword techniques was an extremely absurd matter.

One required a monstrously powerful and stable spiritual sense, required a mastery over countless sword techniques.

In every aspect, this sword style was at the peak of the path of the sword.

No matter how shocking Chen Changsheng's talent in the sword

was, there was no conceivable way he could advance any further.

Because those swords were all independent beings. Whether it was in terms of sword intent, shape, or sword techniques, they all had large discrepancies.

No one could truly fuse these swords into one, transforming them into a truly perfect sword style.

Not even if Chen Xuanba reincarnated or Su Li began to relearn the sword could they manage to resolve this problem.

In the past, Chen Changsheng had also found it impossible to resolve.

Whenever he attacked with these swords in the past, it was tantamount to several hundred Star Condensation swordsmen attacking at the same time.

This sort of sword style was naturally incredibly powerful, a point proved in the alley of the Northern Military Department, on the battlefields of the snowy plains, and on that night in the snowy mountains. It had rendered Xiaode and those assassins from the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets incapable of approaching him, allowed him to kill several hundred wolf cavalry in a few seconds, and let him preserve his life in front of the Demon Lord for a few moments.

But this sword style had a fatal flaw. Each sword had its own battle to fight, and when the momentum of the swords slackened, a gap would inevitably appear.

Those swords, those sword techniques, those swordsmen all called Chen Changsheng, could not become one sword, one sword technique, one Chen Changsheng.

This was the gap that the Demon Lord wanted to use, the moment of death he had prepared for Chen Changsheng.

But he had not expected that after hacking down the pear blossoms, the several hundred swords did not slacken in the

slightest, much less grow disorderly.

Those several hundred swords remained composed from start to finish, exuding an aura of invincibility.

So the Demon Lord did not strike.

He could clearly tell that Chen Changsheng had not yet managed to make these several hundred swords into one.

If Chen Changsheng's cultivation of the sword had reached such a formidable level, he would assuredly be able to step into the Divine Domain at any time and the Demon Lord would already be dead.

Even with Madam Mu present.

Chen Changsheng had most likely found some method to resolve this problem.

Whenever he had used these swords in the past, their positions had not been definite, and he had allowed the sword intents to act on their own volition.

But today, whether they were speedily cutting down the pear blossoms or quietly floating around him, each of those several hundred swords had their own definite position from which they did not move.

Positions were relative, and this sort of surety was a connection.

Both distance and angle were a type of connection.

The connection between two swords was a line.

The connection between three swords was a wall.

The connection between several hundred swords was a world.

A world was a domain.

The domain of an expert at the Star Condensation Realm was called a Star Domain, so a domain formed from swords could be called a Sword Domain.

Chen Changsheng and Luoluo stood in this storm of swords.

Countless specks of star radiance seeped out from the depths of his clothes and illuminated those swords.

A perfect Star Domain layered itself over a perfect Sword Domain.

Those swords trembled in the wind, their bright edges beginning to twinkle as if they were real stars.

This was his world of stars, and no one could enter.

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When those swords left the sheath, they had not parted. Instead, they had formed an even tighter connection, as if they had become comrades.

Chen Changsheng's sword style had undergone an intrinsic transformation.

It was essentially the first time witnessing Chen Changsheng's sword style for the demi-human personages, so they did not sense anything strange.

The Demon Lord had fought Chen Changsheng before, and he was the closest to these swords today, so he had the clearest perception, was the first to discover the problem.

His contemplations had not produced an answer, so he had voiced his question.

"And what sword style is this?"

The observation platform was very quiet.

More and more demi-human experts began to discover this problem, began to sense the existence of the Sword Domain. As a result, they looked with even more shock at those several hundred swords in the air.

Madam Mu's gaze also grew graver.

Several years ago, in the capital, although she had not truly met Chen Changsheng, she had observed those famous battles of his.

The Chen Changsheng of then was already exhibiting a cultivation in the sword far above what was expected of his age, making her somewhat wary.

She had not expected that in just a few years, Chen Changsheng's cultivation in the sword would have taken another giant step forward.

When the star radiance illuminated the Sword Domain, she even felt that Chen Changsheng had the aura of someone who was only half a step from the Divine.

It was no wonder that he only needed the Orthodoxy's Divine Staff to punch a hole through the seal over the Red River.

But what was this Sword Domain? Could it be that sword style? Impossible, he was just one person...

Madam Mu's brow furrowed as she found it hard to believe her own conclusion.

At this point, the Demon Lord spoke once more. "Please grant me your instruction."

His expression was grave and serious.

The chilly wind stirred the dust on the observation platform. There were no more white flowers left to tremble.

By now, the sun had silently climbed up to its zenith, but it was obscured by the clouds drifting in from the Western Sea.

In this absolute silence, countless gazes watched Chen Changsheng, waiting to hear his answer.

Chen Changsheng said nothing.

Luoluo once more stuck her head out from behind him and gave

the Demon Lord a sweet smile. "He won't tell you so he can worry you to death."

The Demon Lord ignored her. Looking at Chen Changsheng, he said, "I didn't expect that in a few weeks, you've advanced your cultivation in the sword so much. However, this so-called Sword Domain of yours uses the Star Domain as its basis. Only in defense is it perfect. The moment you attack, hundreds of gaps will appear. You want to use this move to kill me? That's nothing more than wishful thinking."

Chen Changsheng still said nothing. He slowly took out the Stainless Sword and then placed its hilt into the Vault Sheath.

The atmosphere over the observation platform was now even more fraught with tension. Although none of the crowd had personally witnessed it, many people had heard about the way the Pope fought.

Luoluo quietly took two steps back, her hands on the stone pearl.

Chen Changsheng's expression was calm, but everyone could detect that murderous intent.

He yearned to kill the Demon Lord.

After Zhou Tong, this was the person that he had an explicit desire, even craving, to kill.

Even if it was wishful thinking, he still had to think it.

And besides, he was extremely confident.

As long as Madam Mu and the demi-human experts did not interfere...

He had a seventy percent chance.

Chapter 984 – Frosty Clouds and Collapsing Rocks

Chen Changsheng still did not know what specifically had happened in White Emperor City.

Why would the Demi-human race ally with the Demon race? Just what was the White Emperor couple actually thinking?

But regardless of what had happened, as long as he could kill the Demon Lord, everything could be easily resolved.

Luoluo could not possibly be married off to a dead man.

The Council of Elders and the Demon Commander back in Xuelao City would assuredly go on a thunderous rampage.

And would Black Robe, who was never afraid to think the worst of the world, perhaps believe that this was a trap set by Chen Changsheng and Madam Mu?

Of course, it was extremely difficult to make Madam Mu suddenly change her mind and let him kill the Demon Lord.

But who knew? Perhaps at the crucial moment, Madam Mu would suddenly realize that the Demon Lord's death might be a great benefit to her and the Demi-human race.

The phrase 'it might be very interesting' symbolized an open ending where anything imagined had the chance to come true.

When Chen Changsheng thought of this phrase, so did the Demon Lord.

He realized that he really might lose to Chen Changsheng's sword.

But he still did not think that he could die in another land, far from Xuelao City.

Moreover, just as Chen Changsheng yearned for his death, he

also yearned for Chen Changsheng's death.

If Chen Changsheng died in White Emperor City, even if he was the one to do the deed, the demi-humans would still find it hard to pretend they were uninvolved.

No matter how rigorous of a schemer Madam Mu was, she could no longer play both sides against each other. She would have to completely defect to the Demon race, as the demi-humans were simply incapable of resisting the raging flames of the Human race bereft of its Pope.

When he thought of this possible scenario, the Demon Lord once more resolved to kill Chen Changsheng.

The observation platform was a high and spacious stone platform, a thousand zhang in circumference. Other than the pear tree planted beside the railing, there were no other plants growing on it. With the Xiang clan leader and the other personages having retreated, the platform seemed even more spacious, like a cold and endless plain.

The Demon Lord was still standing underneath the pear tree. There were no white flowers on the branches of the tree, but there were still green leaves, bursting with life.

Across from the tree was a storm of swords, Chen Changsheng and Luoluo standing within.

A chill emerged from the Demon Lord's body, assailing his surroundings.

This chill was so extreme, so pure, that the green leaves seemed to become transparent as they froze.

It was not just the observation platform. In the Imperial City and all of White Emperor City, the rapid drop in temperature caused countless clouds of fog to emerge.

This fog condensed together into a single cloud that was not white, but black.

All of this looked both incredibly strange and abnormally terrifying.

It was like the famous abyss had been moved here by the Demon Lord.

Was this chill the legendary Demon Breath?

This was not Chen Changsheng's question.

In the snowy mountains, he had exchanged blows with two generations of Demon Lord, so he knew that this was the most intrinsic quality of the Demon Imperial clan, and also their most powerful move.

The Demon Lord was the most pureblooded member of the Demon Imperial clan at present.

His Demon Breath was naturally the most purely terrifying substance on the continent.

If he were facing an ordinary human cultivator, the Demon Lord could rely on the extremely cold temperatures naturally caused by the Demon Breath to effortlessly freeze his opponent's sea of consciousness and harden their meridians. Finally, in the most tyrannical fashion, it would destroy his opponent's body.

From a certain perspective, the Yellow Springs art cultivated by the Longevity Sect's Chusu was very similar to this move of the Demon Imperial clan.

When he first realized this, Chen Changsheng had even thought of a certain possibility: the Longevity Sect had been secretly colluding with Xuelao City for several centuries. Perhaps it was only after that previous sect master received instruction from the previous Demon Lord that he began to walk down the evil path that was the art of the Yellow Springs?

The little Black Dragon had made it so that Chen Changsheng was not afraid of Chusu's Yellow Springs art, so he was naturally resistant to the Demon Lord's move.

The flowers of frost dropping from the sky and the icy cloud rising from the city had no effect on him.

His gaze pierced through those snowflakes onto the Demon Lord under the pear tree.

As his gaze descended, countless swords began to howl over the observation platform.

Innumerable sword glows shone and then swiftly disappeared, vanishing from sight.

The Demon Lord did not move, but with a thought, he had begun his attack.

Chen Changsheng did not move, but with a glance, his swords had struck.

The icy cloud enveloped the stone platform, completely obscuring the figures of Chen Changsheng and the Demon Lord.

It was no longer possible to see the flowers of frost, the leaves of ice, or those famous swords in the sky.

All that could be heard was the melodious hums of swords and the occasional heavy crash in the cloud like some roar from the abyss.

Like a bolt of lightning, a sword glow would occasionally light up a part of the cloud, vividly illuminating the structures of those flowers of frost, so beautiful that they seemed unreal. It would also vividly illuminate the two figures in the cloud, so oddly enchanting that they seemed unreal.

The sword like lightning whose light could pierce through the icy cloud was naturally Chen Changsheng's Stainless Sword. No matter how formidable was the Demon Breath within the icy cold, it could not leave a single mark on the Stainless Sword's surface. Even now, its surface was still as bright as a mirror.

Chen Changsheng and the Demon Lord were both using the Yeshi

Step. His Yeshi Step was naturally not as formidable as the Demon Lord's, but with Nanke's instruction over the last few days and his use of sword techniques as movement techniques, he was able to draw level in terms of speed.

Thus, strength was what would decide this battle. 'Strength' sounded like a simple word, but it was actually an extremely complicated and vast concept. Only a true expert of the continent like Bie Yanghong could clearly understand its true meaning. His instruction to Xuanyuan Po two days ago had actually been very important, though it was unknown how much Xuanyuan Po had comprehended.

Chen Changsheng and Demon Lord were both very young, but they were both extremely talented and peerless geniuses. They had already developed their own distinct understandings of this concept. Thus, one could conclude that since the battle had remained within the confines of the icy cloud, no extra Qi was lost as excess.

However, even the Garden of Zhou could be opened by force and not even a Star Domain could truly cut off the world. As long as one lived under the starry sky, one would undoubtedly have a connection with the world. As this battle proceeded, it still managed to reveal some of its intimidating power.

This was an invisible abyss of Demon Breath and a soundless sea of sword intent. Even if it was just ripples that leaked out of the icy clouds, they still had a massive effect on the surrounding environment. Countless deep fissures began to spread across the stones outside the cloud, an ever-expanding spider web. If not for the protection of a seal, the entirety of the vast platform would have already collapsed into a pile of rubble.

Farther away, this battle had even greater effects.

The plaza in front of the Imperial City was now playing host to many fine marks, short but straight, as if they had been carved out

by a sword.

Countless ants surged out of the ground, but before they could walk even half a foot, they were frozen by an invisible Qi, upon which they swiftly decayed.

An extremely deep crack suddenly appeared on the outer edge of the Whalefall Platform.

With a terrifying crack, the Whalefall Platform collapsed.

A massive rock tumbled down, picking up speed and howling through the air as it smashed towards the densely packed crowd in front of the Imperial City.

Chapter 985 – The Sword Descends into a Thousand Piles of Snow

The Imperial City was built along the mountain and had extremely steep slopes. The observation platform was located at the highest point and was very far from the square in front of the Imperial City. The massive rock that had broken off from Whalefall Platform was rolling down the slopes with a terrifying momentum, crushing countless walls and fake mountains on the way, but there was still some time before it smashed against the ground.

Upon hearing the thunderous booming, many people turned up to look. Their faces instantly went ghastly white and they turned to flee. But the crowd was packed and it was no easy task to promptly escape to safer ground. Screams, yells, curses, and sobbing quickly turned the plaza into a scene of complete mayhem.

The sounds of Whalefall Platform collapsing and the ensuing cries and screams could also be heard on the observation platform.

Many ministers and generals were frozen from shock. They had no time to react, much less resolve the imminent tragedy.

On the other hand, those true experts who were in time to react and had the ability to save those people did not react at all.

They remained fixated on the icy cloud, all their attention on those intermittent sword glows.

The massive rock that had broken off from Whalefall Platform would lead to the death of hundreds of civilians in front of the Imperial City, but to these important figures, this was a minor matter.

The outcome of this battle was the truly important event, because it would decide the lives of millions.

Suddenly, the bright sword cries vanished and winds blew in

from all directions, dispersing the icy cloud.

The swords flew out from the depths of the cloud, returning to Chen Changsheng and Luoluo, where they vibrated and buzzed.

Who had won?

Chen Changsheng's face was somewhat pale and there was an extremely shallow cut behind his left ear, the congealed blood there holding his hair in place. In the daylight, a few black stains could be seen in the short and shallow wound, most likely crystallized Demon Breath. However, they had been wrapped up in some sort of substance and were now glistening.

The Demon Lord was in a somewhat sorrier state.

The golden loop tying his hair had been chopped into ten-some pieces and his hair was now scattered, drifting in the air behind him.

Five tears had been made on his clothes, straight and deep. Just a glance was enough to see that they had been inflicted by a sword.

Only one of these tears had blood seeping out, a golden syrup that was still striking, even in the gloomy light.

The pear tree had been rendered into tiny chunks by Chen Changsheng's swords. Scattered about the ground by the wind, they became one with the dust, impossible to distinguish.

Standing on the now-empty ground, the Demon Lord appeared somewhat desolate.

Had Chen Changsheng really won?

Just what sort of sword style was he using?

The demi-human experts viewing this battle were shocked to see this sight, and countless ideas bubbled forth in their minds over a few seconds.

Yes, Chen Changsheng had won this battle.

If not for the unfathomable tenacity of the Demon Lord's body, he might have already been cut in two by the Stainless Sword.

Of course, the Demon Lord's cultivation level and techniques were truly terrifying, and the storm of swords had not affected his vision in the slightest. His resolve was even more formidable, as he had taken extreme risks, enduring four of Chen Changsheng's strikes to launch a furious counterattack that had wounded Chen Changsheng.

One could not underestimate that shallow wound near Chen Changsheng's neck. The black stains in the wound were crystals formed from the Demon Lord's purest Demon Breath. The moment they encountered flesh, they would begin to rapidly spread, just like sparks of fire setting an entire plain ablaze. Even an expert of the Divine Domain would have to immediately leave so that they could find a method of removing those Demon Breath crystals.

There was a high impassable distance between Chen Changsheng and the Divine Domain, so his death should have been assured. Fortunately, he had been born with a stainless constitution and then been bathed in dragon blood. Along with the fact that his body was bursting with the energy of Sacred Light and that his blood was mixed with the true blood of the Heavenly Phoenix, he had just the right factors to suppress the Demon Lord's move.

The observation platform was as silent as a tomb, making the rumbling and cries from below all the more distinct.

The demi-human experts still paid it no mind. They stared at Chen Changsheng and the Demon Lord, stupefied. Their moods were somewhat complex as their minds gradually began to change.

The icy cloud had concealed the storm of swords and the peerless demon techniques, but how could the demi-human experts possibly not sense the danger and terror contained within?

Chen Changsheng and the Demon Lord were naturally two of the strongest in the younger generation.

But the level of cultivation, strength, and everything else they had displayed in this battle had still surpassed the wildest reckonings of the entire continent.

More importantly, this was a battle with historic consequences.

Neither Chen Changsheng nor the Demon Lord had entered the Divine Domain, but one was the Pope of the Human race while the other was the sovereign of the north. All of the continent firmly believed that as long as they were given enough time, they would cross that threshold. In other words, they were always, and would undoubtedly become in the future, true Saints.

They were soon to be rulers of this continent, their names recorded countless times in the annals of history. When they were still young, they had fought, and so the result of this battle would assuredly continue to affect the situation of the continent for centuries, constantly rewriting history.

Just what would happen next?

When the demi-human experts saw Chen Changsheng raise the Stainless Sword once more, they couldn't help but suddenly feel a chill.

Was Chen Changsheng really planning to continue until he killed the Demon Lord? Would a finishing period have to be written on this span of history in advance?

When he saw Chen Changsheng raise his sword once more, the Demon Lord's face paled, not out of fear, but anger.

Besides killing intent, he also saw a hint of ruthlessness in Chen Changsheng's eyes.

Before the start of the battle, he believed that he could rely on his own abilities to kill Chen Changsheng.

So he had not prepared to use his strongest move.

Even with the Astral Executioner in hand, he still felt like that

move was too vicious, that it was best left unused.

He had not expected Chen Changsheng's cultivation of the sword to become so powerful in just a few short weeks.

Let alone killing him, even defeating him was now a challenge.

This made him feel greatly ashamed.

So he made a decision.

He gripped the hard and frigid object in his sleeve.

He waited for Chen Changsheng's sword to slash down.

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When the Demon Lord gripped the object in his sleeve, no one noticed anything strange.

The clouds gathering over White Emperor City began to move faster.

The massive rock was still rolling down, getting closer and closer to the ground. Countless demi-humans screamed and wept, powerless and hopeless as they waited for death to descend.

The Demon Lord was waiting for Chen Changsheng's sword to descend.

Madam Mu's expression turned grave.

Was it because of the object in the Demon Lord's sleeve, or was it... because Chen Changsheng's sword did not descend?

Yes, no one on the observation platform thought this would happen.

With a swoosh, countless swords flew out of the sheath in Chen Changsheng's hands.

But those swords did not slash at the Demon Lord. They flew off the observation platform, into the clouds.

Those swords stirred the clouds, bringing away with them countless wisps, appearing somewhat like mists.

But they were more like lightning, because the swords were too fast. With the eyes, one could only see the bright trails they left in the sky.

Some people who saw this even had a misperception.

When these swords entered the mists, they were already in front of the Imperial City.

At that moment, the massive rock falling from the sky was still several dozen zhang away from the ground.

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The weeping and screaming crowd that was fleeing in all directions gradually came to a stop.

Because they had stopped feeling the quaking, had stopped hearing the rumbling of the massive rock.

But there was no silence. Instead, an incessant grinding noise was coming from above them.

When they looked up at the sky, they stood in awe.

They saw a mystical sight.

The rock had stopped and was floating in the sky.

Countless swords like bolts of lightning were slashing at the bottom of the rock, and the sounds of hacking and slicing filled the air.

Those swords were too swift. In a few seconds, they had gone back and forth countless times.

Innumerable straight seams appeared on the rock. More and more appeared until it crumbled.

Fearful screams once more arose from the plaza.

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Some people had been injured in the rush to escape. Unable to move, they were right under the massive rock.

A noble lady of the upper city was in absolute despair, looking very pitiful as she wept.

A Bear tribe laborer from the Pine Paths hugged her and put his sturdy back between her and the sky.

Just a moment ago, for the sake of throwing the chef of the steamed bun store out of the crowd, he had injured his leg, so it was too late for him to leave.

But no matter how sturdy his back was, it could not possibly bear the weight of the rock.

Even if he did hold the noble lady to protect her in his embrace, all that awaited was being crushed into a pulp together.

But in the final moments of one's life, to have the warmth of an embrace, to feel some kindness, to grant some kindness, was still some comfort.

The fearful screams told the noble lady that the rock was about to descend and her weeping grew louder.

The laborer embraced her even tighter.

After some time, those fearful screams suddenly became the ecstatic cries that came from living through a disaster.

The noble lady gradually stopped crying and took a fearful glance at the sky.

The massive rock did not land.

Nor was there a torrential rain of shards.

Stone powder was gently drifting to the ground.

This stone powder was fine, light, white.

It looked like snow.

The Bear tribe laborer helped her up.

The noble lady was somewhat embarrassed.

In the drifting stone snow, the two met each other's gaze.

When they thought of that intimate embrace, they both couldn't help but feel a little awkward.

The noble lady softly said, "Thank you."

The laborer scratched his head and said, "You're welcome."

The noble lady stared into his eyes and seriously said, "I want to marry you."

Chapter 986 – One Person's South Stream

Temple Sword Array

The important personages in front of the stone hall did not know of those events taking place in front of the Imperial City, did not know what specifically had happened, and certainly did not know that the massive rock had been slashed into a thousand piles of snow and become the reason for a marriage between a Bear tribe laborer and a noble lady of the upper city.

But they knew what the swords that had flown out of Chen Changsheng's sheath had done.

Silence reigned around the observation platform.

Chen Changsheng had won again.

The Demon Lord was well aware, as were all the important individuals, just where Chen Changsheng had won, and what was meant by 'again'.

Madam Mu maintained her indifferent visage, and it was impossible to tell what she was thinking. However, individuals like the Xiang clan leader and the Grand Duke from the Deer tribe had rather nasty complexions.

The Bear tribe leader was greatly relieved, feeling that his judgment of Chen Changsheng had not been wrong. The Shi clan leader was even more satisfied, feeling that the Pope was one of careful thought and outstanding judgment, as he had remembered that he could use this method to strengthen the friendship between the Human and Demi-human races, even in this tense moment.

Chen Changsheng had not thought of so much. He only realized this was happening and then set out to resolve it.

Acting according to one's heart, what need was there to think?

Countless swords flew back to the observation platform, rejoining the several hundred swords around Chen Changsheng.

At this moment, an apathetic and lofty voice that seemed to come from the sea of stars appeared.

"Let us stop here."

The speaker was Madam Mu.

Chen Changsheng did not stop.

He wanted to kill the Demon Lord and the Demon Lord wanted to kill him. Since life and death had not yet been decided, the battle had naturally not come to an end.

Until the end, there was no true victory or defeat.

The air over the observation platform was cut into countless regions by the awe-inspiring sword intent.

The torrential rain of sword energy seemed ready to tear apart the clouds.

The snowy plain of star radiance in his body was fiercely burning.

His sea of consciousness raged with waves several hundred zhang high.

The swords in the sky, guided by his spiritual sense, exhibited every kind of wondrous sword technique, all of them working together to kill the Demon Lord.

The rain of swords descended with the crisp cry of countless swords, its momentum even greater than before.

In the face of such a powerful attack, in the face of this sword style that no one could see through, the Demon Lord was without fear.

Even though he had already lost twice to Chen Changsheng's sword.

His expression was very calm, his two hands hanging at his sides, hidden in his sleeves.

Only he knew that Madam Mu's words had not been for Chen Changsheng, but for him.

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The abyssal Qi released by the Demon Lord in the fight had caused the temperature in White Emperor City to drop by several degrees. The streets that had been warmed by the sunlight for only a little while began to fill with mist once more. Suddenly, the mist began to swiftly flow to the upper reaches of the city.

Madam Mu had finally moved.

A wave of her sleeve had stirred a wind from the Western Sea, attracting all the mist on the two shores of the Red River to this place.

Mist surged into the Imperial City and flowed up the stone steps, passing through the flowers and trees, finally reaching the observation platform, where it congealed into a cloud.

This was a most real cloud, yet it possessed the most unreal of details. Compared to the Demon Lord's icy cloud, this cloud was whiter, like a flock of sheep. It seemed a very simple construct, but if one probed it with the spiritual sense, they would understand what it meant to be truly unfathomable.

The white cloud swallowed up the Demon Lord's figure and then blocked the rain of swords.

The observation platform was silent.

Chen Changsheng and the Demon Lord were both quite extraordinary. In the future, they would undoubtedly become true Saints.

Madam Mu had been a Saint for many years now.

Even if Chen Changsheng and the Demon Lord brought the treasures of the Orthodoxy and most revered demon artifacts with them, they were still no match for her.

Moreover, she was the Empress of the Demi-humans. While the White Emperor was in seclusion, her will had the greatest voice in the Demi-human race.

It was perhaps for these reasons that the Demon Lord did not resist, allowing the white cloud to swallow him.

As he vanished, he still had not removed his hands from his sleeves.

Chen Changsheng also did not have the swords continue their descent.

Time silently pressed forward. After a few moments, the white cloud on the observation platform dissipated.

The Demon Lord was nowhere to be seen, transported from the depths of the cloud to some other place.

Chen Changsheng pensively gazed at the stone fissure on the ground.

A gorgeous sleeve slowly dropped down. The white cloud flowed back down to the city below like a waterfall as all became peaceful.

Madam Mu drew back her hand.

Chen Changsheng did not sheathe his swords.

He gazed at Madam Mu.

The several hundred swords in the sky slowly moved with his gaze, ultimately pointing at Madam Mu.

This scene had a very strange beauty to it, and also an unimaginable tension.

Did he really want to attack Madam Mu?

"Impudent!"

With a terrible expression on his face, the Grand Duke sternly rebuked Chen Changsheng, "Your Holiness, quickly withdraw your swords!"

Several tribal leaders and ministers also rebuked Chen Changsheng.

More of them remained silent.

This silence symbolized many things.

Footsteps resounded over the platform.

The Bear tribe leader, carrying his metal staff, stood behind Chen Changsheng.

The Shi clan leader followed him, though he stood a little closer to Luoluo.

Immediately after, the Prime Minister, several Grand Scholars, and more and more demi-human personages stood behind Chen Changsheng and Luoluo.

The alliance with the demons was the will of the White Emperor and Empress, and had obtained the approval of the majority of the Council of Elders. However, in the palace debate, still forty percent of the gathered tribal leaders, ministers, and generals had stated their firm objection.

And now, the circumstances had changed even further.

Pope Chen Changsheng had arrived, bringing with him the Human race's most unswerving response, driving off the Demon Lord.

Although Madam Mu's hand had put a stop to the battle, everyone could see who had won.

This was a very important point.

The demi-human personages who had good relationships with the humans or doted on Princess Luoluo now had more confidence.

Those personages who considered more the advantages for the Demi-human race were also beginning to think differently.

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Madam Mu calmly looked back at Chen Changsheng and asked, "I save your life, and not only do you not return my kindness, you also want to strike me with your swords?"

Chen Changsheng knew what she meant.

Right when his swords were descending, he had suddenly had felt an incredibly ill foreboding, as if something extremely dangerous was about to occur. He rarely had this sort of feeling. The last time was when that pillar of light was piercing through the sea of stars to descend upon the snowy mountains.

He had noticed that the Demon Lord had kept his hands concealed in his sleeves the entire time.

Had the Demon Lord been intending to use the Astral Executioner?

But even if the Astral Executioner could be used again, how could the Demon Lord communicate his position to the starry sky?

There was no answer to this question, because Madam Mu's actions had put a stop to it.

Chen Changsheng knew that Madam Mu had not meant him any kindness. She had most likely acted because, for various reasons, she did not want the Demon Lord to use that method.

But she had still put a stop to it all, causing that extremely intense sense of peril to vanish, so he did not retort.

Madam Mu did not care about the change in situation.

She was interested in Chen Changsheng's swords.

"Just what sort of sword style are you using?"

The Demon Lord did know what sort of sword style Chen Changsheng was using. Madam Mu was also not sure. The extremely old and experienced Xiang clan leader and the extremely wise Shi clan leader also did not recognize Chen Changsheng's sword style.

Because no one had ever seen this sword style before.

This was the first time since the Heavenly Tome Monoliths descended upon the world that this sword style appeared under the starry sky.

Chen Changsheng replied, "Unity Sword Art."

The majority of people present had never heard of these words.

Madam Mu had heard of it, and she had guessed at it earlier, though she had found it impossible to believe.

Even now, hearing the answer from Chen Changsheng's mouth, she still found it difficult to believe.

She silently thought for quite some time, then said, "I never expected, nor, I believe, did the first Holy Maiden, that the South Stream Temple sword array that awed the world... could actually be used by one person."

Chapter 987 – The Sword Is His Fate

Madam Mu's words cast the observation platform into an eerie silence.

The Unity Sword Art that Chen Changsheng spoke of was the South Stream Temple sword array!

But since it was a sword array, how could he use it alone?

Just what was going on here?

To many people, Madam Mu's rueful comments were an enigma.

They simply could not understand, or perhaps it was better to say that their brains simply could not grasp such a concept.

The Xiang clan leader had long since cultivated to half a step from the Divine Domain. Excluding Madam Mu, he was the expert with the highest cultivation level of the people present, so he quickly understood the meaning of Madam Mu's words.

His expression became abnormally grave. In the gaze he aimed at Chen Changsheng, there was now respect alongside wariness.

Since a sword array was an array, it naturally had to be formed from many swords. It was impossible for one person.

The South Stream Temple sword array was famed throughout the world, but it could be no different. Although two South Stream Temple disciples could use the Unity Sword Art to fight a foe, exhibiting some of the sword array's strength, the true and most powerful South Stream Temple sword array required several dozen disciples working together.

Even the most insane of individuals would not dare imagine that the South Stream Temple sword array would one day appear in the hands of just one person. Just as Madam Mu said, probably not even the monstrously talented first Holy Maiden who had created the South Stream Temple sword array had imagined that such a

scene would take place.

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How had Chen Changsheng been able to accomplish this feat?

His spiritual sense was incomparably powerful and serene, like the waters of a deep mountain stream, unable to be severed and never running dry.

He had countless famous swords that he had formed empathetic connections with. He used them like his hand used his fingers.

He had countless sword styles. With a thought, the sword techniques of various sects would come in a continuous stream.

Thus, at the very beginning, in the Garden of Zhou, he could use one spiritual sense to form ten thousand swords into a dragon.

Later on, he learned to divide his spiritual sense into several hundred strands that would control several hundred swords, relying on this skill to force his way into the alley of the Northern Military Department.

But just this was still far from enough to make the South Stream Temple sword array appear in his hands.

To use several hundred strands of spiritual sense to control several hundred swords was just an increase in quantity. The swords were not cooperating with each other and were fighting their own battles.

The South Stream Temple sword array was too complicated, and besides, the might of the sword array needed the disciples forming it to cooperate to truly be utilized.

Chen Changsheng had been able to resolve this problem through an opportunity.

One could also call it chance, karma, or fate.

From the moment the Tang Old Master gifted him the Yellow Paper Umbrella, his fate became inseparably linked to swords.

This was the case whether he was discovering the Sword Pool in the Garden of Zhou or learning the sword from Su Li in the wilderness.

Several days ago, upon meeting Xiao Zhang in Fengyang City and learning that something had changed in Holy Maiden Peak, he became worried for Xu Yourong's safety and forced his way to the summit of Holy Maiden Peak.

At the time, Xu Yourong had been on the other side of the stone wall, so he sat on the edge of the cliff, watching the sun set over the Tong River. Somewhat bored, he began to read.

Thus, he learned the Unity Sword Art.

On the next day, his and Xu Yourong's swords worked in harmony, stunning the world.

He then went to Mount Li. As he arduously pressed through the sword path, his cultivation in the sword advanced once more.

After that, he mounted the crane and set off on his journey of eighty thousand li. It was very boring, so in his idle thoughts, he suddenly thought of a possibility.

Since the Unity Sword Art was the foundation of the South Stream Temple sword array, since he and Yourong could harmonize their swords, then could he and these swords work together?

As the White Crane pierced through the dark clouds while bathed in starlight, he pondered these questions.

After thinking for an entire night, he encountered a few incidents, where he made a few experiments with his swords.

Finally, he understood.

From that moment, the storm of swords had an order, each

sword having its own position. A connection formed between them.

Position was relative and connections went in both directions. The sword intents conformed, the sword energies joined, and as they grew and multiplied, a sword style was formed.

Thus, a sword array was formed.

How strong was the South Stream Temple sword array?

Several days ago, in the ceremony to close the temple, Wuqiong Bi, an expert of the Divine Domain, was powerless against the hurriedly formed sword array formed by several dozen South Stream Temple disciples.

If not for Huai Bi's treacherous blow, perhaps Xu Yourong would not have needed to break out of seclusion.

Even Zhou Dufu had needed a great deal of energy and wisdom to break through South Stream Temple's sword array and enter Holy Maiden Peak.

From a certain perspective, Chen Changsheng alone was a South Stream Temple sword array.

It was no wonder the Demon Lord lost to his sword.

"Your Holiness the Pope is truly a genius of the sword, one that is hard to find even once a generation."

Madam Mu said this with a very calm expression, but her mood was not so.

Chen Changsheng's feat was truly too absurd. Even she had to sigh in emotion and then raise her guard further.

When she thought of her unflinching stance toward Chen Changsheng when discussing with the White Emperor, she could not help but feel some regret.

Chen Changsheng answered, "I have only obtained the shape. I am still missing the spirit."

He was not being humble but speaking the truth.

Madam Mu calmly replied, "Of course, or else would not Your Holiness even be able to kill me?"

The meaning of this question was very complicated.

To be able to kill meant that he had the ability to kill, and also that he wanted to kill.

Chen Changsheng felt Luoluo behind him lightly pull on his clothes. He quietly thought for a few moments, then asked, "Why did the Demon Lord appear in White Emperor City?"

He did not follow the line of conversation Madam Mu had laid down but asked his own question.

The meaning of this question was also very complicated and very difficult to respond to.

Because he had asked even though he knew the answer.

Several hundred swords were still quietly floating in the air, following Chen Changsheng's gaze to aim at the distant Madam Mu.

The mists lingering about the flowers, trees, and stone walls of the Imperial City had not yet dispersed. At any moment, they could reform into a white cloud and devour all.

People stared into each other's eyes, apparently wanting to see the weakness in each other's eyes. The mood on the observation platform was even more tense and oppressive.

Madam Mu did not answer Chen Changsheng's question. This was an extremely intelligent choice. More importantly, she had the means of stopping this line of questioning from Chen Changsheng.

She looked at Chen Changsheng and said, "You should currently be more concerned with another matter."

White Emperor City was prepared to renounce its alliance with the Human race and form one with the Demon race. What could be

important than this?

Through his clothes, Chen Changsheng sensed that Luoluo's small hand was rather cold. This caused his heart to slightly sink and for him to remain silent.

Madam Mu added, "Alas, in the end, you still came a little late."

The Divine Staff had burst with light and the White Crane had flown through the clouds. He had used the South Stream Temple sword array to win a great victory over the Demon Lord and drive him away. Luoluo would not be married, and even if the demi-humans still wanted to ally with the demons, the situation was momentarily under control. The Human race had gained a little breathing room, so how had he come too late?

Madam Mu said, "A few days ago, Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi, two of the Storms, were ambushed by demon experts deep within the mountains and heavily injured. For some reason, they refused my assistance and vanished. Presumably, they have already returned to the sea of stars. Your Holiness is too late to send them on their final journey. It is truly a pity."

Chen Changsheng froze.

He turned his head to Luoluo.

Luoluo lowered her head.

Chapter 988 – The Young Lady Walking Up to the Small Courtyard

Bie Tianxin had died in the scheme of the Great Western Continent.

Whether it was the Imperial Uncle of the Great Western Continent or Mu Jiushi, their actions had obtained Madam Mu's consent, her tacit approval.

Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi's journey to White Emperor City to avenge their son was well within expectations. But Chen Changsheng had never expected that they would disregard their injuries and immediately step on the journey to revenge after leaving Holy Maiden Peak.

Black clouds and a seal had cut off an area of several hundred li around the Red River from the rest of the world. When the battle between the Divine was causing White Emperor City to shake and making the Red River burn for an entire night, Chen Changsheng was on the White Crane, bathed in starlight as he pondered how to make the South Stream Temple sword array one of his moves. As a result, he still knew nothing of this incident, though the capital had received the exact details last night.

Luoluo softly and quickly recounted the events around the time of the Heavenly Selection ceremony, like the fiery blood of the Divine dropping from the sky on that day. Lastly, she mentioned that Xuanyuan Po had taken part in the ceremony in order to stop the Demon Lord from winning and was now heavily injured and in a coma.

Only now did Chen Changsheng realize that in the few days after his departure from the Prince of Luling's estate, so many things had happened.

He was very concerned over Xuanyuan Po's safety and even more

concerned for Bie Yanghong, because judging by Madam Mu's tone, Bie Yanghong had probably died already.

Back when he was leaving Mount Han, while seated in South Stream Temple's carriage, he would occasionally glimpse a streak of red in the distant wilderness. Later on, he met Bie Yanghong again in front of the Mausoleum of Books. However, he had never gotten a chance to have an earnest conversation with him, and when they met a few days ago in South Stream Temple, he had come to take revenge.

Chen Changsheng was truly not acquainted with Bie Yanghong, and there existed only loathing between him and Wuqiong Bi, but he really did like Bie Yanghong.

Just like the Tianhai Divine Empress, Wang Zhice, Wang Po, and everyone else that had interacted with Bie Yanghong.

Bie Yanghong was a gentleman, a good person. In complete contrast to Su Li, he had always had an inextinguishable sentiment of kindness to this world. This was despite the great difficulties brought by the endless road of cultivation and the Daoist companion at his side, both of which were liable to make one feel dejected.

On Holy Maiden Peak, Chen Changsheng had clearly felt Bie Yanghong's kindness toward him. Even when all the evidence pointed to him, Bie Yanghong was still willing to give him a chance to explain. This sort of trust was very heavy and engendered a deep respect.

The senior that he respected had just experienced the anguish of losing his only son, and now he had died in the distant lands of a foreign country?

Chen Changsheng's hand trembled as it clenched his sword.

The several hundred swords in the sky trembled in concert, letting out low buzzes. A torrential rain seemed about to fall.

Awe-inspiring sword intent enveloped the observation platform. The target of its incredible sharpness was extremely obvious.

It was precisely the person that Chen Changsheng was looking at: Madam Mu.

"So the Demi-human race was already prepared to start a war."

These seemingly calm words brimming with the will to fight caused the observation platform to explode into an uproar.

But no one could ease Chen Changsheng's worries, not the Bear tribe leader, the Shi clan leader, or the Prime Minister.

Because the veins of this matter were far too clear. It was impossible to explain clearly, even if they had the desire to.

The Great Western Continent's Imperial Uncle Mu and Mu Jiushi had killed Bie Tianxin so that they could frame Chen Changsheng. Upon their failure, Mu Jiushi fled to White Emperor City. To protect her, Madam Mu laid a trap in White Emperor City to kill Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi, brazenly turning against the Human race and allying with the demons.

These were the facts. A detail might differ here or there, but this was the general picture.

Chen Changsheng asked, "Which demon expert did you invite? Black Robe or the Demon Commander?"

Madam Mu did not answer the question, calmly replying, "I did not strike."

Chen Changsheng replied, "But you activated the seal, preventing them from requesting aid."

"I originally did not plan to answer your question because I felt that it was laughable as bickering with a child. But now, I suddenly realize that you should be more prudent."

Madam Mu sneered, "Even if I did not activate the seal, you think that someone would come? Then think about this: the news that

I've decided to ally with Xuelao City was spread out last night, so why has no one appeared yet?"

Chen Changsheng said nothing.

"I have heard that Wang Po has suffered significant injuries, so it can be understood why he has not come, but what of the Prince of Xiang? Or the Sect Master of the Mount Li Sword Sect? That you were able to appear in itself is a surprise. Did no one attempt to stop you? More importantly, in such a grand event, why has your teacher not appeared?"

Madam Mu said with pity and derision, "Your Holiness, you are still too young."

Because he was young, he was liable to get hotheaded, and thus impulsive, and so he now stood here alone?

Was this the meaning?

Chen Changsheng recalled the letter he had received in the Prince of Luling's estate and suddenly felt somewhat tired.

After receiving that letter, he almost immediately mounted the crane and flew west with scarcely a thought.

Mounting the crane and flying west was truly something to feel sad about, right?

But who had made him the Pope of the Human race? Who had made him choose this day?

This being the case, what right did he have to be tired, what time did he have to be sad?

With a light click, the Stainless Sword and the Vault Sheath parted. The several hundred swords in the sky howled through the air as they returned into the sheath.

This was the first time many of the demi-human personages had seen this sight, so they couldn't help but be somewhat shaken by this sight.

Chen Changsheng ignored Madam Mu, straightforwardly asking, "Do any of you have a clue?"

Luoluo, the Bear tribe leader, and the other individuals shook their heads.

A ruckus suddenly rose from Whalefall Platform, followed by hurried footsteps.

The Archbishop of the Western Wastes, several dozen priests, several officials of the Great Zhou, the Tang clan stewards, and the cultivators from the south climbed the stone steps.

The Red River Beast Guards charged with guarding the Imperial City had sufficient strength to stop them, but the situation in the Imperial City was abnormally chaotic today. Many of the supervisors had vanished, and the Beast Guards that were from the Bear tribe or the Shi clan were deliberately relaxed, allowing this party to force their way through.

Upon seeing Chen Changsheng, the archbishop and his group quickly bowed, after which they brought the heavily injured Xuanyuan Po forward.

Chen Changsheng's expression did not change as he took off Xuanyuan Po's clothes and saw his terrible injuries. He took the needles from around his finger and began the treatment.

Time slowly passed. His head remained bowed, all his focus on the treatment.

Luoluo remained crouched at his side, occasionally using a towel to wipe his sweat.

The observation platform was silent with no one daring to speak.

After some time, Chen Changsheng finally raised his head.

In a shaky voice, Luoluo asked, "How is it?"

She had just been able to see that Chen Changsheng had used true essence to force two pills into Xuanyuan Po's mouth.

From his cautious expression, she could tell that these two pills were the legendary Cinnabar Pills.

But even after this, Xuanyuan Po remained unconscious.

Luoluo was somewhat flustered.

"If he can wake up, it's fine, but if he can't..."

Chen Changsheng did not finish. Raising his head, he silently gazed at the streets of White Emperor City.

Xuanyuan Po was next to him.

Bie Yanghong was probably hiding somewhere in the city.

He didn't know whether either would survive.

Had he truly come too late?

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A stray cat walked down the street. It warily took stock of its surroundings, somewhat confused.

Why was the Pine Paths so quiet today?

It did not know that the owner and servers of the bun store, as well as the laborers, had all gone to the plaza in front of the Imperial City. They wanted to see the excitement of the Heavenly Selection ceremony and personally witness the pride of the lower city: Xuanyuan Po's victory.

Why was the street so foggy despite the fact that the sun had risen ages ago?

It had no idea that the Demon Lord was currently in battle, that the terrifying abyss was seemingly making its way from the snowy plains of the extreme north to White Emperor City.

Suddenly, the stray cat dropped its tail and fled.

A young lady appeared in the foggy street.

Almost like this was a dream, an illusion.

Just like her face.

It was so beautiful that it did not seem real.

She walked into the alley called Three Harmonies Borough. Accompanied by the low ringing of the bell from the temple to the Celestial Tree, she walked up the small courtyard.

As her eyes fell upon the wooden gate, her nostrils flared, making her seem both careful and cute.

And then she caught a whiff of a smell.

"It stinks."

Chapter 989 – I Use a Sea of Fire to Meet the Yellow Springs

The bell from the temple to the Celestial Tree stopped, leaving the depths of the small alley in silence.

The young lady quietly stood in front of the wooden gate, apparently in deep thought.

A low roar came from within the small courtyard. This voice was so low that it almost couldn't be heard, yet it was as clear as if it had come from right next to her ear. It was brimming with venom and curses, imbued with a naked rage. It was an extremely bizarre sound.

Several streams of black mist rushed out from the seams of the gate along with this roar.

But immediately after, this roar from the courtyard suddenly became a cry of fear.

The polluted black mist did not even dare to approach the young lady. It instantly drifted far away as if filled with dread. Occasionally, the wind would blow a few strands of black mist toward the young lady, where they would be burned into wisps of smoke by a golden flame.

At those moments, painful yowls would come from the small courtyard, like the whimpers of a dog.

The gate of the courtyard could not endure the clash of these two opposite Qis. It began to visibly decay, and then it slowly collapsed.

Upon walking into the courtyard, the young lady saw the neat pile of wood and froze.

She recalled that on her first visit to the Orthodox Academy, she had seen a neat pile of clothes in the wardrobe in Chen Changsheng's room.

The short pine growing near the wall of the courtyard had withered some time ago, making the remaining green mixed with brown all the more striking.

The white cobblestones bore ten-some black footprints, so small that they seemed to belong to a child.

The door to the house had decayed away and several streams of dark liquid were slowly dripping from the beams, giving off an unbearable stench.

The once-secluded small courtyard had now become a bizarre and frightening scene.

Behind the half-collapsed remains of the paper door were Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi.

They leaned against the wall, their faces pale. They seemed almost dead, but they were still alive.

Just a few moments ago, they were about to be killed, even eaten, by Chusu, but then Chusu suddenly disappeared.

Nothing seemed to be happening in the small courtyard, but Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi, as experts of the Divine Domain, could naturally see that a silent but dangerous battle was taking place within and without the courtyard.

When the golden flames rendered the black mist into wisps of gray smoke, Bie Yanghong knew who had come.

He glanced at Wuqiong Bi, finally relieved.

No matter how terrifying Chusu was, he would never be able to defeat the young lady.

Because the young lady was Xu Yourong.

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Yes, the young lady standing in the courtyard was Xu Yourong.

On the shore of the Tong River, she received Chen Changsheng's letter, handed the White Crane over to him, and returned to Holy Maiden Peak.

At the time, no one knew what she would do next, not Ye Xiaolian, not Chen Changsheng, and not even herself.

She did not know why the first thing she did after returning to Holy Maiden Peak was convening the disciples and taking care of temple matters.

As she handled these matters, she knew what she needed to do, or perhaps what she wanted to do.

So handling became handing over. After handing over the affairs of the temple, she left Holy Maiden Peak.

The White Crane could fly extremely fast. Other than experts of the Divine Domain, no one could keep up with it.

She had left one day after Chen Changsheng, but she had arrived at White Emperor City at basically the same time.

Because she could also fly.

Just when she was prepared to go to the Imperial City, she suddenly sensed something, something that made her uncomfortable.

It was like if one were walking amongst a clean plain of grass, white as far as the eye could see, and suddenly saw a rotting corpse.

It was like if one had eaten until stuffed and then saw a plate of pork so cold that the oil was now a congealed white.

In short, it was an extremely unpleasant mental experience.

Her Dao heart was brightly lit, so she could sense it all the more clearly, found it all the more difficult to endure.

Thus, she tracked this feeling down to the end of this alley, where she smelled that stench.

To her surprise, when she entered the courtyard, she saw Wuqiong Bi and Bie Yanghong.

Chen Changsheng had no idea that a battle between the Divine had taken place over White Emperor City several days ago, and neither had she.

They had both been flying at the time.

Upon seeing Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi, Xu Yourong quickly guessed at the truth of the matter.

Perhaps 'deduced' was the better word.

But she still did not find the person that made her extremely uncomfortable, extremely wary and uneasy.

There was someone that could hide from her eyes, was so skilled in concealment?

Xu Yourong did not speak to Bie Yanghong or Wuqiong Bi, nor did she enter the room.

She quietly stood in the courtyard, seemingly lost in thought.

A chilly wind came in from the alley.

Pine needles rustled down from the dead tree.

Her eyelashes trembled.

Suddenly, a spark landed on those needles.

With a boom, the pine needles began to fiercely blaze into a wall of fire.

This wall of fire began to spread, quickly surrounding the entire courtyard.

Innumerable flames began to rise from the ground, incessantly blazing between the white stones.

Xu Yourong calmly stood in the sea of fire.

Deep within the ground, a scream of absolute rage could be

heard.

Crickcrack!

White stones were sent flying into an air as a figure was forced out of the ground by the flames.

It was a short and hunchbacked fellow, covered in a black robe and the awful stench of decay.

He was using the black robe to tightly cover his face, apparently extremely afraid of the flames. Only his two hands were showing, their surface covered in ugly scales and black fur. Their sharp claws were caked in filth and a few traces of decayed blood and flesh.

Grating screams of fury continuously rose from the black robe.

He waved his claws as if wanting to leap and tear Xu Yourong to pieces, yet he did not dare take a step forward.

Xu Yourong calmly gazed at him and asked, "You are Chusu?"

The furious screams from the black robe stopped, turning into a panting sound that could not be distinguished as crying or laughing.

Chusu was bitterly laughing, but he wanted more to cry.

He had never expected to meet this person in White Emperor City.

In Wenshui, Chen Changsheng had been accompanied by three Prefects of the Orthodoxy and Guan Feibai, but he had not been afraid. This was because he cultivated the secretive and treacherous art of the Yellow Springs and was also extremely skilled in hiding and escaping. Even if Zhexiu had enough strength to kill him, Nanke had enough speed to keep up with him, and even if someone like Qiushan Jun appeared, he had still been confident in his ability to evade capture.

No matter what he did, even if he could not succeed, he could still

easily escape.

This was the case in Hanqiu City, in Wenshui, and when he confronted Xiao Zhang.

But he knew that he had a bane.

It was precisely the young lady within the sea of fire.

Xu Yourong was faster than him, and her brightly lit Dao heart made her impervious to his mental attacks.

More importantly, her temple sword could restrain his Yellow Springs art.

To put it another way, no matter how selfish and cruel he was, he had to engage in a hotheaded battle today.

Only this way would there be the slightest chance of victory.

With a rip, the back of the black robe tore open.

Accompanied by a putrid stench, a pair of gray, ugly, and fleshy wings unfurled from Chusu's back.

The white stones on the ground shrieked into the air and smashed at Xu Yourong.

Chapter 990 – A Sword Shines on the Shore of the Red River

Several hundred hard white stones shot like arrows at Xu Yourong's body.

Yet this was not the beginning of a horrifying battle, but rather that of an escape.

Chusu had no confidence that he could defeat Xu Yourong. He did not even dare to attack her.

Hotheaded? Battle? Only a complete idiot would make such a choice.

He only hoped to leave alive, with the best case being a retreat with his entire body intact.

Under the cover of the white stones, he crashed through the wall of fire, transforming into a gray blur as he fled toward the alley.

All that was left behind was an anguished howl of misery echoing through the courtyard.

The wall of fire was the true fire of Xu Yourong's Phoenix blood. Even he had to pay a grievous price to break through it.

Xu Yourong watched as the gray blur vanished, her slender brows rising.

A gale howled, causing the white stones assailing her to drop down to the floor.

Two wings of holy white unfurled behind her.

The wall of fire suddenly disappeared, as did the flames rising from the ground.

Xu Yourong also disappeared, transformed into a stream of light as she pursued.

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The crystals on the floor were powder, stained black and giving off the stench of decay.

The small wooden pagodas had also rotted into what were essentially piles of pulp.

Fear could still be seen on Wuqiong Bi's face, confusion in her eyes.

Bie Yanghong glanced at her. With some difficulty, he raised his hand and rubbed her head, soothingly saying, "It's okay now."

When his hand touched her head, Wuqiong Bi let out a shriek, like some small and startled beast. This was followed by a stream of filthy curses, pouring out of her thin and pale lips for quite some time.

She cursed at Xuanyuan Po and Xu Yourong, summarized thusly: 'Is Xuanyuan Po, that bear cub, so engrossed with marrying the demi-human princess that he doesn't care about whether I live or die? Since Xu Yourong is in White Emperor City, why did she appear so late? Did she do it on purpose to make things hard on me?'

Bie Yanghong's complexion turned somewhat unsightly, taking a while to return to normal. He knew that his wife had never in her life encountered true defeat, so the encounters of the last few days had truly scared her quite badly, making her somewhat dazed. He truly found it hard to discipline her.

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The sound of the bell from the Celestial Tree temple had ceased and the mists pervading the streets of the Pine Paths had been summoned to the Imperial City by some power. Three Harmonies Borough was quiet and peaceful. If not for the grim scene within the small courtyard, it would be difficult to imagine the intense

battle that had taken place here.

This battle was now taking place far away from the small courtyard, in another street.

The puddles on the damp street suddenly evaporated as the place became abnormally dry. The trees planted along the shore to protect against the wind rustled, their leaves yellowing, then blackening, as they drifted down to the ground. It was like some invisible brush was giving them new coats of paint.

The shore of the Red River suddenly exploded with light.

Countless ripples appeared on the surface of the river, then massive waves. The massive Jings let out low roars, expressing their respect and servitude. They then swam deep into the river, concerned over the effects of this battle.

As the waves settled, the trees swayed in the wind. The stones on the street grew damp once more, the stench of filthy water gradually rising.

Xu Yourong returned to the small courtyard with a thin arm, covered in scales and black fur, in her hand.

The place where the arm had been severed seemed to have been rubbed with something, preventing any blood from coming out.

A normal girl seeing a strange arm that did not belong to a human would assuredly scream in fright and would certainly not carry it.

Xu Yourong cared about cleanliness, but she did not care about such things. Her brows were knit together as if she was thinking about something.

No one was capable of seeing the battle just now, but it had really taken place and was extremely intense and dangerous.

On a rock by the shore of the Red River that had ruptured into two, she had used the temple sword to slice off Chusu's right arm

but failed to keep him.

The Yellow Springs art that Chusu cultivated was truly terrifying, its techniques erratic with all kinds of eccentricities. Even with her brightly lit Dao heart, she found it impossible to completely see through.

Xu Yourong was prepared to enter the courtyard to examine Bie Yanghong's injuries when she sensed something and vanished.

Since he had come, there was naturally no need for her to appear, or to put it another way, she had no desire to see him right now.

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Deep within the mountains on the other shore of the Red River, Chusu walked out from a stream with a heavy stone in his left hand.

The black robe on his body was soaked and clung tightly to him, revealing the deformed and bizarre curves of his body and making him seem all the more wretched.

At the most dangerous moment, he had used his right arm to block Xu Yourong's Sword of Great Light and hidden in the river. Borrowing the giant bodies of the Jings, he hid in the mud at the bottom of the river. Finally, he found the hidden entrance into an underground river and, after danger upon danger, managed to escape.

Severely wounded by the loss of his arm, he could not endure the turbulence of the currents in the river. If he hadn't been hugging the stone, he might have been flushed back into the Red River to become a ghost under Xu Yourong's sword, or rammed to death on the rocky walls of the underground river.

He threw the stone onto the ground and sat down. He gasped for breath, his head lowered, and he seemed in incredible pain.

In the past, even if he had lost the arm, a secret technique of the Yellow Springs would help him regrow his lost limb. Thus, in every assassination or battle, he could use all his strength, almost insanelly attacking Chen Changsheng or Xiao Zhang.

But this time, he would not be able to regrow his arm.

The stump of his arm was edged with divine Qi from the temple sword of South Stream Temple.

Even more frightening was the drop of Heavenly Phoenix true blood that was already spreading through the wound.

Let alone regrowing the arm, if he did not immediately find a place to rest, this drop of blood would continue to eat through his flesh and meridians until it finally destroyed all his Yellow Spring Yin openings, his flesh, and his entire mind.

He heard the cry of a crane in the distance.

Chusu's body trembled and he raised his head toward that cry, his eyes brimming with fear.

If he were found by Xu Yourong again, the only path left for him would only lead to death.

He decided to not return White Emperor City, even though the only person willing to protect him, Madam Mu, was there.

He had failed to complete the mission Madam Mu had given him, and now Xu Yourong was within.

He was truly afraid of Xu Yourong.

So it was in the past.

And even more so now.

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The White Crane landed in the small courtyard.

It was accompanied by a gasp of surprise and a curse from

Wuqiong Bi.

All of the Pine Paths began to come to life.

The Archbishop of the Western Wastes, several dozen priests, the Tang clan stewards, ten-some southern cultivators, the Great Zhou ambassador, experts from the army, the Bear tribe leader, and a large number of demi-human experts all came to this place, tightly surrounding the small courtyard.

It was somewhat similar to the situation from last night, but the atmosphere was even more somber.

Because the Pope had come.

No one noticed Xu Yourong standing on the eaves of the temple to the Celestial Tree.

Whether it was because she had seen someone or had not seen someone, she seemed very satisfied.

So she gave a faint smile, so beautiful that it could topple a city.

Chapter 991 – I Request My Lord to Kill Two People

Before the White Crane landed, Chen Changsheng sensed that something strange had happened in the small courtyard.

Upon sensing the remnants of foul Qi, his heart sank, because these were clearly traces left by the Yellow Springs art. Immediately after, he noticed signs of flame. He thought of a possibility but quickly rejected it.

Why had Chusu come to this courtyard? Just who was he fighting with? Chen Changsheng glanced at the unconscious Xuanyuan Po, all sort of questions in his mind. However, the situation was too tense, so he had no time to think about them for now.

He had no idea that on the roof of the temple to the Celestial Tree, she was watching him.

After walking past the ruined door and the bits of blackened paper, Chen Changsheng saw Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi.

Madam Mu had said that Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi were already dead, so why were they still alive and in Xuanyuan Po's little courtyard?

Just what had happened? Chen Changsheng found it hard to shake off his shock, but it was not the time to ponder these questions. He forcefully waved his hand, causing several hundred swords to fly out of his sheath. Letting out clear cries, they flew out of the window, forming a South Stream Temple sword array and locking down the small courtyard.

Only now did he relax a little, placing Xuanyuan Po down on the floor.

Bie Yanghong was also shocked, but he was more concerned about the unconscious Xuanyuan Po. Seeing that Chen

Changsheng was preparing to treat him, he stuck out a hand to stop him. "First take a look at him. How did he suffer such heavy wounds? Is he in danger?"

Wuqiong Bi couldn't help but comment, "This bear cub has a thick skin. He could take a few blows from a sword and still be fine."

Bie Yanghong glanced at her, a hint of rage finally appearing in his eyes. Wuqiong Bi felt like she was being wronged, thinking to herself, I'm just worried that if your injuries are not seen to, it will be more difficult to treat them. But against his gaze, she did not dare speak.

"These injuries are from being struck by a Heavenly Tome Monolith, from taking on the energy of the world. As long as he can wake up, he can still endure."

Chen Changsheng voiced the assessment he had made on the observation platform. He then disregarded Bie Yanghong's objections and kneeled in front of him, beginning to take his pulse.

As time passed, he grew increasingly stern, his fingers having been replaced by needles some time ago.

After some time, he removed the needles. He seemed hesitant to speak.

Bie Yanghong said nothing, only patted Chen Changsheng on the shoulder.

Chen Changsheng realized that he already knew.

"I must trouble Your Holiness to examine my wife's injuries."

Bie Yanghong had an extremely high cultivation level, so he already had a basic understanding of his wife's injuries. However, since Chen Changsheng was world-famous for his medical skills, he wanted to make sure.

Chen Changsheng turned to Wuqiong Bi and asked her to

cooperate. Wuqiong Bi's expression was somewhat unbearable, or perhaps it was awkwardness.

"There are no major problems. Some rest and recuperation will be all that's needed to cure her."

Wuqiong Bi had lost an arm and seemed terribly wounded, but Chen Changsheng could clearly see that her injuries were far lighter than Bie Yanghong's. It could be imagined from this how many dangerous blows Bie Yanghong had blocked for her in that battle between the Divine.

If he had not blocked those monstrous attacks for Wuqiong Bi, she would certainly not be in this state.

Since they were husband and wife, a husband doing some things for his wife was only right and proper.

Chen Changsheng was in somewhat of a poor mood, somewhat unwilling, in the same way that the vast majority of people viewed this couple.

And Wuqiong Bi still did not know what was going on! She had no idea what Bie Yanghong had done for her, what he had endured, what he would soon endure. She was still muttering to herself.

Under Bie Yanghong's gaze, Wuqiong Bi did not dare curse, but she was still very annoying.

For what reason did her husband have to take on everything while she could still live?

Chen Changsheng raised his head and gave Bie Yanghong a profound look.

Bie Yanghong shook his head so subtly that it was hard to notice unless one was staring at him.

Wuqiong Bi did not notice, but for some reason, perhaps because she was affected by the mood, she finally fell quiet.

The room became very quiet.

Chen Changsheng recalled that scene in front of the Mausoleum of Books, the lotus sea, the red flower, the heaven-shaking might of this couple. He then looked at this couple weakly leaning against the wall, their faces pale. He was suddenly filled with sadness.

"Who was it?"

If the White Emperor was really in secluded cultivation, unaware of worldly matters, then even if Madam Mu was accompanied by a group of demi-human experts, it would be very difficult for her to force Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi into this state. Moreover, Madam Mu had personally said in the Imperial City that she herself had not attacked them. So just who had the ability to wound Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi so severely? Was it Black Robe and the Demon Commander, as he had guessed? Or was it the legendary Eight Great Mountain Men?

Bie Yanghong knew that he still had time, and he also knew that the following conversation would be very important as the Human race determined its future course. Thus, he was in no rush to give his opponent's name, but instead chose to very seriously and logically narrate his entire experience.

"We followed the trail of the Deep Freeze Dragon Breath, and in the third Celestial Tree on the left-hand side, we saw Lady Zhusha."

Chen Changsheng finally learned of the little Black Dragon's specific location. He thought, it must have been the legendary Wildfire of the Celestial Tree cutting off my mental connection with her.

Bie Yanghong continued, "We saw Madam Mu and Mu Jiushi, and also... Black Robe."

Even though he had expected this, Chen Changsheng was still shocked to hear this name.

"Who else did the demons send?"

"No one else. It was Black Robe alone."

Chen Changsheng could not understand. If Madam Mu had only acted to stop any messages and did not actually attack Bie Yanghong and his wife, just Black Robe alone was logically not enough to wound Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi to this degree.

The enigmatic Demon Military Advisor was unquestionably a true expert, his strength unfathomable.

But Bie Yanghong was also no ordinary expert of the Divine Domain, and in the years after the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, his strength had further increased. He had essentially become the head of the Storms, and if he were given two more centuries, there was even a chance he could break past the Saint Realm and enter Concealed Divinity.

"The demons sent no one else, but the Sacred Light Continent sent people."

Bie Yanghong slowly said, "Two Angels of the Sacred Light came. One governs judgment, and I name it Hidden Thunder. The other governs war, and I name it Anger's Flame. The two did not understand any Dao, but they could transform the principles of the world and use them. They were naturally Divine, and in terms of fighting strength, they are similar to me."

Chen Changsheng was truly stunned. For a while, he could not speak.

Not waiting for him to ask anything, Bie Yanghong spoke once more.

His expression was abnormally solemn, as if he hoped for Chen Changsheng to remember every word.

"If you meet them, please kill them."

With these words, a violent killing intent surged up, rising like a

banner, a spear, breaking out of the small courtyard and up into the heavens.

At this moment, Bie Yanghong's finger touched the center of Chen Changsheng's brow.

Chapter 992 – Only Understanding After Many Years

Bie Yanghong was heavily injured, his actions very slow. Chen Changsheng could easily avoid the finger, but he did not, because he trusted Bie Yanghong.

It was hard to see what Wuqiong Bi was thinking as she bore witness to this sight, but it was easy to see her shock. She wanted to stop her husband, but she remembered Bie Yanghong's earlier words and did not dare to act.

A warm, gentle, and pure Qi, like a fine wine, traveled through the tip of Bie Yanghong's finger into the center of Chen Changsheng's brow.

The sea of consciousness was beneath the center of the brow, or else the distance between Nanke's eyes would not have been getting larger and larger.

Countless rays of light illuminated Chen Changsheng's gloomy sea of consciousness and then transformed into countless images.

These were the scenes of Bie Yanghong's battle on the cliff and in the sky with the two Angels of Sacred Light.

These scenes were so vivid that they appeared to be taking place right before his eyes.

The scenes from the first-person perspective in particular allowed him to experience and perceive everything that had happened from Bie Yanghong's standpoint.

He saw Mu Jiushi fleeing in fear and the serene grace of Madam Mu.

A tree was growing on the edge of the cliff. The wind stirred its shadow, making it into the corner of a black robe.

There was a cloud in the sky, and where the cloud broke, light

descended onto the world, within it two powerful beings from the other continent.

They had wings of pure white and no gender. They exuded holy rays of light and a powerful Qi that made them impossible to examine too closely, and they appeared extremely aloof and arrogant.

But in reality, they had no positive or negative human emotions. On their faces was an apathy that surpassed the realm of mortals.

From a certain perspective, they were perfect.

They were Angels of the Sacred Light Continent?

Chen Changsheng also heard their voices.

They were presumably using the language of the Sacred Light Continent, its tones strange and complicated.

Because these scenes were created from Bie Yanghong's spiritual sense, their voices were not, as they had been on that day, transformed by the breeze into the language of the continent.

Chen Changsheng still understood a little.

The language of the Sacred Light Continent was somewhat similar to the language of the Dragon race.

When he was memorizing the final book of the three thousand scriptures of the Daoist Canon, he became extremely familiar with the Dragon language. More importantly, he had studied under Zhizhi's tutelage beneath New North Bridge for a very long time.

The stealers of fire's source? What did that mean?

As he pondered this question, the two Angels from the Sacred Light Continent began their assault.

A straight ray of light appeared in front of his eyes, cleaving the sky into two.

And then, the light, in defiance of all the laws of this world,

turned back, descending from another angle.

The Angels began to attack faster and faster, and the light moved faster as well, cutting the sky into incredibly fine pieces.

Countless fantastical attacks came from every imaginable angle in an unending stream.

With Chen Changsheng's cultivation level, he was finding it harder and harder to make out every detail, but he could still sense a great deal.

This was the true experience and intelligence gained from the battle with the two Angels. It was a red flower illuminating the sky, severing the trajectories of the light. It was the trail of a fist as it blasted through the clouds, ignoring the laws of the world. All these things entered his sea of consciousness through Bie Yanghong's finger.

As time passed, the rays of light grew increasingly dense, weaving and intersecting as they gradually formed a field of blazing white.

An explosion rumbled through Chen Changsheng's sea of consciousness.

Countless massive waves smashed against the invisible but bounded embankments of his mind.

Chen Changsheng woke up. He felt no other discomfort besides a slight ache in his sea of consciousness.

And then he felt somewhat hot. Put more accurately, the surface of his body was boiling hot.

He entered Meditative Introspection, upon which he discovered that all the paths of his Ethereal Palace were connected and the snowy plain of star radiance was currently on fire.

It was not a fierce flame, but the entirety of the plain was ablaze with a dark blue flame that extended to the horizon.

Bie Yanghong's finger left his brow, but the battle experience and, more importantly, a Divine Domain expert's comprehension and understanding of the laws of the world remained in his sea of consciousness. There was also the intense will to fight, the will to kill, as one contended against those two Angels of the Sacred Light Continent.

This was unquestionably the best state Chen Changsheng had been in since he had formed the ten thousand swords into a dragon within the Garden of Zhou.

The several hundred swords calmly floating outside the room sensed his transformation, vibrating and letting out low hums.

All of White Emperor City could sense an unmatched and awe-inspiring sword intent.

The priests and Bear tribe warriors in the street subconsciously wanted to retreat.

After some time, Chen Changsheng opened his eyes. He suppressed that will to fight, causing the awe-inspiring sword intent enveloping the courtyard to recede.

He knew that on his long path of cultivation, the knowledge that Bie Yanghong had left in his sea of consciousness would help him pass many crooked roads. And if he were to meet those experts from the Sacred Light Continent, the experience and fighting will in his sea of consciousness would lend him even more strength.

Bie Yanghong glanced at the unconscious Xuanyuan Po and said, "The fist style that I used in the battle with those two—I once mentioned it to him. In the future, if he has any interests or questions on this Dao, I request that Your Holiness help me instruct him."

He quite liked this bear youth and felt that there was a connection between them. Coupled with the kindness shown to them, he had decided to instruct Xuanyuan Po yesterday.

He had originally planned to truly teach his fist style to Xuanyuan Po today, but it now seemed that he could only entrust this task to Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng replied, "He's always been a member of the Orthodox Academy, so please be at ease, Senior."

In those scenes, he had seen the appearances and fighting styles of the two Angels, but he still had many questions.

Especially about the Sacred Light exuded by the two Angels. He was far too familiar with it.

His blood and flesh were packed with this type of Sacred Light.

Was this the source of the other continent's name?

Not even the three thousand scriptures of the Daoist Canon had many records on the distant and mysterious Sacred Light Continent. Only in a few extremely ancient scriptures could one find a few sentences couched in the language of myths.

As a child, Chen Changsheng had become an erudite scholar of the Daoist Canon and read many more books besides. Perhaps he was born in the Sacred Light Continent, but in the previous ten-some years of his life, he had no understanding of the Sacred Light Continent.

At the very beginning, he even thought that the Sacred Light Continent did not exist.

Only after Su Li took the Holy Maiden of the south away, and Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong discussed on the Bridge of Helplessness where those two seniors might have gone, did he finally develop this concept. And it was only after the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, where he saw together with the Tianhai Divine Empress that monk, that he confirmed that the Sacred Light Continent really did exist.

The imperials really had escaped there, and on that side, there were also countless experts beneath the starry sky.

And then, there was the night in the mountains.

The mighty Demon Lord who had almost conquered the continent had died beneath a pillar of light from that end of the starry sky.

That pillar of light shook the entire continent and worried Chen Changsheng to no end.

He had not forgotten the Tianhai Divine Empress's final act before her death.

She burned the last of her soul to heavily wound the monk by that stream near Xining, with no care for the fact that her legacy was completely severed.

At the time, no one understood why she had done this.

Now, Chen Changsheng understood.

Chapter 993 – Quietly

There were still some things that Chen Changsheng did not understand.

On that night in the Mausoleum of Books, the monk from the other continent had not come with his true body. He had used some sort of method to send over his soul.

The two Angels from the Sacred Light Continent that Bie Yanghong had encountered clearly had corporeal bodies. How did they come?

If it was so easy to travel between the two continents, why had no one from the Sacred Light Continent ever appeared before?

He brought up this question with Bie Yanghong, and also inquired as to the method the imperials had used to escape to the Sacred Light Continent.

And more importantly, what was the relationship between the Demon race and the Sacred Light Continent?

Bie Yanghong did not give concrete answers to these questions, because he was not sure if his speculations were correct, so he did not want to affect Chen Changsheng's judgment.

He said to Chen Changsheng, "For these matters, you should ask your teacher."

There was nothing wrong with this response. In this world, Shang Xingzhou was assuredly the person with the deepest understanding of the Sacred Light Continent.

He had picked up Chen Changsheng from the stream, driven away the Golden Dragon, and invited the monk from the exiled imperials to come to this world and attack the Tianhai Divine Empress.

His shadow was behind every matter related to the Sacred Light

Continent, or else his direct participation.

And those matters were all related to Chen Changsheng.

He did not know what to say.

Bie Yanghong solemnly warned, "Your Holiness must be careful."

Chen Changsheng understood his meaning.

The battle between the Divine several days ago was a naked attack against a human expert by Madam Mu and the Demon race. What was even more worthy of their caution was that this matter now involved the other race on the other end of the starry sky. The Human race needed to make the strongest response in which Chen Changsheng, as the Pope, also had a duty to bear. At the same time, he would also have to endure a massive pressure.

Crucially, he had to make clear just what Shang Xingzhou was thinking.

Those were all matters for the future, as there were many matters in the present that needed his attention.

Chen Changsheng glanced at Wuqiong Bi.

Wuqiong Bi fiercely glared back.

Chen Changsheng drew back his gaze and asked Bie Yanghong, "Do you really not need to say anything?"

Bie Yanghong shook his head.

Chen Changsheng once more turned to the comatose Xuanyuan Po.

Xuanyuan Po had a sturdy body and a face covered in whiskers, making him seem rather old. In reality, though, he was the youngest in the Orthodox Academy.

Chen Changsheng, Tang Thirty-Six, Su Moyu and Zhexiu loved to tease Xuanyuan Po, but they also doted on him.

He had no idea when Xuanyuan Po would wake up.

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Chen Changsheng walked out of the courtyard and ordered the Archbishop of the Western Wastes that no one was permitted to step into the alley.

The archbishop grunted in acknowledgment. He did not ask a silly question like 'what do I do if such and such comes?' Since no one was permitted to step into the alley, then even if the White Emperor and Madam Mu came, or Shang Xingzhou and the Emperor came, none of them would be allowed inside.

Upon sensing the Qi of the several dozen experts in the streets and the incredibly clear Qi of the Li Palace's array, Chen Changsheng somewhat relaxed.

The White Crane cried out as he mounted it and flew into the air. The several hundred swords around the small courtyard flew through the air with him.

Though he knew that everything was probably okay on that side, he was still rather worried and nervous.

So he did not notice that, before leaving, the White Crane had glanced at the Celestial Tree temple as if greeting some person.

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Upon confirming that Chen Changsheng had left, Wuqiong Bi instantly regained her composure. She rushed to Bie Yanghong and shouted, "There's something wrong with your brain! What if something happened?"

She was referring to Bie Yanghong's using his finger to transmit his experience in the battle of the Divine and his wisdom to Chen Changsheng.

It was a transmission technique secretly passed down in Xiling's

Ten Thousand Years Pavilion for seven thousand years, called 'One Point of Red'.

A teacher could use this technique to directly pass on their understanding of cultivation to their disciple.

This Daoist technique was very mystical and equally dangerous. The slightest lack of caution would lead to backlash from the technique.

In the past, it was only before the Grand Examination or the opening of the Garden of Zhou that Xiling's Ten Thousand Years Pavilion would choose a few most exceptional students lacking in experience to use this method on.

If one wanted to use this Daoist technique to transfer one's skills and energy to a disciple, there was even more danger, essentially resulting in death for both the sender and the recipient. For this reason, such an event had only happened twice in the seven-thousand-year existence of this technique in the Ten Thousand Years Pavilion.

Wuqiong Bi had truly been worried when she had seen Bie Yanghong's finger touch Chen Changsheng's brow. Her anger now was actually rather reasonable.

Bie Yanghong quietly looked back at her, saying nothing.

Wuqiong Bi suddenly recalled that in these last two days, he had often quietly looked at her like this, not saying anything. She then recalled that in the last two years, he would often quietly gaze at the distant mountains. After that, she recalled what the common people would often say about her and her husband, what those people, Wang Po and his ilk, would often say with their eyes... She suddenly felt flustered and anxiously held her tongue.

She and Bie Yanghong had been married for many years, so he naturally knew what she was thinking. He faintly smiled and rubbed her head.

Wuqiong Bi was even more flustered, because though Bie Yanghong had respected and protected her in the last few years, it had been ages since he had last made such an intimate gesture.

In order to dispel the anxiety in her heart, she awkwardly changed the subject, asking, "Why didn't you tell him that Xu Yourong had visited?"

"That the Holy Maiden did not appear indicated that she does not want Chen Changsheng to know. I naturally will not say more."

Bie Yanghong thought for a few moments, then said with heartfelt sincerity, "In the future, you need to treat His Holiness the Pope and the Holy Maiden with more respect."

Wuqiong Bi angrily replied, "I certainly don't have the energy to waste on such empty gestures. In any case, for your sake, they won't do anything to me, or are you planning on throwing me away?"

Bie Yanghong said nothing, only sighed.

Wuqiong Bi recalled his earlier action and once more grew uneasy. She muttered, "If worst comes to worst, I'll change my temper in the future, kill fewer people."

Bie Yanghong still said nothing.

Wuqiong Bi's expression turned nasty. "Are you really prepared to cast me aside?"

The more she thought about it, the more she felt this was true. Both anxious and angry, she began to cry, then curse.

To Bie Yanghong, there was nothing fresh or new about her curses. Time and time again, it was still those same phrases: 'conscienceless old fool', 'heartless and poor scholar', 'if it wasn't for me back then, this and that would have happened'. And yet, just when he was truly beginning to get angry...

Wuqiong Bi, her face drenched in tears, said, "Now I have no

hand, or even a son. If you leave, what will happen to me?"

Bie Yanghong sighed and hugged her, lightly patting her on the back so as to stop her from crying too hard.

Her temper had always been this bad. He had always known, but he had never been able to do anything about it.

After some time, Wuqiong Bi grew tired from her crying and cursing. Leaning against his chest, she fell into a deep sleep.

Even while she dreamed, her left hand was tightly latched to his collar, as if she was afraid that he would silently leave.

Bie Yanghong did not sleep. He quietly looked at her face, his thoughts impossible to read.

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The mists in the mountain dispersed.

The sound of waves could be heard from far below at the bottom of the cliff.

Chen Changsheng got down from the White Crane and walked forward.

In front of him was a Celestial Tree, its trunk stretching into the clouds.

At the base of the tree was a large hollow.

Inside was a small house.

A girl dressed in black quietly stood in front of it.

Chapter 994 – Lovers Prattle Beneath the Celestial Tree

The girl in black was naturally the little Black Dragon.

As a Protector, she shared a mental connection with Chen Changsheng that was extremely difficult to cut, so even though she was silently hidden away all this time, Chen Changsheng had still been able to confirm that she was safe. But since this connection was being screened by the Wildfire of the Celestial Tree, Chen Changsheng had found it impossible to determine her specific location. With Bie Yanghong's clear directions, though, such a task was now extremely easy.

The Celestial Tree was so high that even one of its hollows could hold a room. As a result, the little Black Dragon's figure seemed even more tiny and weak.

Chen Changsheng's gaze fell on her ankle. When he saw the chain, he couldn't help but recall that common sight in New North Bridge, causing his heart to sink.

The little Black Dragon asked, "Why did you come so late?"

Chen Changsheng was deeply apologetic, but didn't know how to explain.

The little Black Dragon looked over his shoulder at the White Crane and her face instantly turned cold as ice.

Chen Changsheng did not notice this change in her mood, and even if he did, he wouldn't understand why.

He walked up to Zhusha and kneeled down, beginning to inspect the chain that imprisoned her here.

A dense clattering of swords rose from under the tree.

In an extremely short span of time, ten-some famous swords, the Stainless Sword included, came down one after the other, but none

of them could break the chain.

Unlike the chain from under New North Bridge, there was no divine Qi on this chain blocking all attacks. But this chain seemed to be one with the cliff, imbued with some type of array that transferred all the attacks on the chain to the cliff.

In other words, if one wanted to snap this chain, one first had to destroy the cliff.

Destroying the cliff was not actually impossible for the current Chen Changsheng. The problem was that such an action could possibly sway the Celestial Tree's foundation. What would he do if this caused Wildfire to surge out from underground? He could escape on the White Crane, but could he just stand by as the Black Dragon was swallowed up by the Wildfire?

Since he could not, he could only think of another method to break the array.

He recalled the name of this seal and wondered if there was possibly some saying about it.

The little Black Dragon tersely said, "The White Emperor clan were white tigers in the first place, and this toy is meant for imprisoning members of their own tribe, so isn't it only right for it to be named as such?"

Chen Changsheng answered, "Luoluo is looking for the key, though I worry that it will take too long... If the Tiger Cage is also an array, I plan to write a letter to Yourong and invite her over. She could probably think of a way."

At the time, he had requested Xu Yourong to teach him how to break the seal beneath New North Bridge. Although it was ultimately the previous Pope that ended up doing the deed, Xu Yourong was still very formidable in this aspect.

The little Black Dragon's frosty visage instantly dissolved as she angrily roared, "Riding another girl's crane to save me, and you can

even do something like this!"

Startled, Chen Changsheng asked, "Do what?"

The Black Dragon grew even angrier, rebuking, "You even want her to come and save me! And save me twice! Just what sort of brain do you have in there!"

Chen Changsheng felt like his brain truly was not working properly, as he simply had no idea why the little Black Dragon was so angry or what her words meant.

He had lived together with the Black Dragon on the northern frontier for three years, eating, working, and living together. They were extremely close, but there were still many times when he could not understand her mind.

Riding another girl's crane? Having her come and save her twice? Just what was this thing she was talking about?

He subconsciously explained, "She's my fiancée; there's no need to be courteous."

The Black Dragon resentfully retorted, "You're my first man, so why have you been acting so courteously with me all these last few years?"

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The highest point of the Celestial Tree was far above the cloud layer.

The sunlight fell amongst the branches, a beautiful scene awash in golden light.

A pair of white wings slowly furled. Xu Yourong stood on the tip of a branch, swaying with the wind.

She stretched out a hand and plucked a Lava Fruit from the leaves. Her bright eyes bursting with curiosity, she carefully took a bite. After a while, she contentedly nodded.

In the next moment, her expression slightly changed, no longer so content.

It was not because the Wildfire Qi contained in the legendary Lava Fruit was too rich and had harmed her, but because she had heard a conversation carried up by the wind from below.

"Riding my crane to see another girl is fine, but to do it with two... Mo Yu really wasn't tricking me back then. There's definitely a problem between you and the two of them."

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Chen Changsheng came to his senses as he realized where the problem was.

It had been a very long time since they had first gotten to know each other beneath New North Bridge. He had long since learned what had happened back then and what she had always thought about it.

At the time, he had taken an enormous risk and performed Meditative Introspection, igniting the plain of snow that was his star radiance and almost burning himself into nothing.

At that crucial moment, the little Black Dragon poked open the center of her brow and used the true blood of a Black Frost Dragon to save him.

And this was her most precious and purest first blood.

Based on the laws of the Dragon race, this action was tantamount to choosing Chen Changsheng to be her husband.

In the following years, especially those three years on the northern frontier, she had always kept this mindset.

She was the one that Chen Changsheng needed to thank the most for the chance to live until this day, but though he could use his life without hesitation to save her, he could not accept this matter.

Because he had an engagement, even though this engagement had been revoked once.

Earlier, because he truly had no idea how to confront this situation, he subconsciously did not think in that direction.

This conversation packed with resentment and apology had truthfully taken place between him and the Black Dragon many times.

In the end, it still ended with his silence.

In the end, the little Black Dragon was still the one to break the silence.

"You good-for-nothing, you don't dare to marry two people? With Luoluo, it's only three; can you not even maintain that as a Pope? Are you that afraid of Xu Yourong?"

She sneered at Chen Changsheng, "Let's stop talking about this. Take care of your matters, but be careful. Don't push Madam Mu too hard, or she really might dare to kill you."

Chen Changsheng worriedly asked, "Then what about you?"

The little Black Dragon proudly said, "No one dares to kill a noble Black Frost Dragon on the shores of the Red River."

Chen Changsheng did not completely trust these words. He knew that the demi-humans had been able to found their country in large part due to the Black Frost Dragon tribe, but forgetting favors owed was very commonplace, and who could guarantee that Madam Mu would not go crazy? But there truly was no meaning in his remaining here for now.

He thought it over, then said, "Sorry."

The little Black Dragon helplessly said, "Chen Changsheng, I am your Protector. Do you really want me to repeat that word back to you?"

The White Crane took flight and left.

The Black Dragon watched the crane fly off and suddenly gave a soft sigh.

No sign of arrogance could be espied on her face, no sneering smile that looked down on the world, no ruthless visage. There was only a faint forlornness.

At this moment, she was just an ordinary girl dressed in black watching as her lover went far away.

A voice came from the Celestial Tree above.

"Loneliness only requires one person, but to be forlorn requires two, because it is an emotion that only appears after parting."

The little Black Dragon warily looked up.

She saw Xu Yourong.

Xu Yourong calmly asked, "But he is my man, so why is he making you feel forlorn?"

Chapter 995 – Meow

The little Black Dragon had never met Xu Yourong, but she knew that this person was Xu Yourong.

The rumors were true. Xu Yourong was truly very beautiful. Even she had to admit this.

But she had not expected that Xu Yourong would say such things on their first meeting.

Those words seemed to have somewhat of a literary air about them, but there was no way she could not hear the declaration hidden within.

No, it had not even been hidden. Xu Yourong had made no attempts to hide it. She had clearly declared her ownership of Chen Changsheng.

The Holy Maiden rumored to be so pure actually had such a strong desire?

The little Black Dragon even remembered those vulgar and low-level mother dragons on the southern isles and taunted, "Do you want to take a piss on him?"

These were truly very vulgar words, but Xu Yourong was not angry. She calmly said, "Perhaps there is another way to resolve it."

The little Black Dragon coldly returned, "How do you want to resolve it?"

Xu Yourong glanced at her ankle and indifferently said, "I have no means of removing this seal in a short time, but I also don't want him to always worry over this matter, causing him to feel more and more apologetic to you. Thus, I have decided that from now on, I will make some time every day to accompany you. This way, you will not be lonely, much less mistake loneliness for forlornness."

The Black Dragon angrily said, "I certainly don't need your company. Just looking at you makes me annoyed."

Xu Yourong faintly smiled. "You're his Protector. I naturally have to take care of you well, have to thank you."

The Black Dragon sneered, "What does that have to do with you? He's my man!"

Once again, Xu Yourong was not angered by these words, nor did she argue. Stroking the Black Dragon's black hair, she smiled and said, "Good."

The little Black Dragon was depressed to the extreme. She fiercely shook her head, attempting in vain to escape Xu Yourong's hand.

Seeing this, Xu Yourong happily said, "Truly so cute."

The little Black Dragon was infuriated. "I'm going to eat you!"

Xu Yourong faintly smiled once more. "As long as you don't eat him."

The little Black Dragon froze for a while, then suddenly understood, her face turning red as she spat, "How can a woman like you be so shameless!"

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"I'm sorry, Teacher; I was unable to find the key."

Luoluo raised her head, shooting an uneasy glance at Chen Changsheng.

This place was the highest stone hall in the Imperial City, her residence in White Emperor City.

Chen Changsheng was not surprised by this answer, but was surprised by Luoluo's fear.

Back in the Orthodox Academy, Luoluo was just as cute as she

was now, but she had never shown such an expression.

Just what had happened? Or was it that Madam Mu wanting to marry her off to Xuelao City had not only harmed her heart, but also made her afraid?

Luoluo glanced at the White Crane outside, looked at the expression in his eyes, then carefully asked, "Won't Teacher's wife be unhappy?"

Chen Changsheng was perturbed by this question, asking back, "Why would she be unhappy?"

He really did not understand why Xu Yourong would be unhappy. Just a while ago, he also had not understood why the little Black Dragon had said that there was something wrong with his brain.

Luoluo was somewhat relieved by his answer, but she was still rather nervous. She probed with another question. "Teacher, you don't blame me, right?"

Chen Changsheng recalled how when Luoluo was leaving the capital, she had written a letter to him saying that she had deceived him, that she was really the same age as him, just a few months younger.

Was she worried that he would blame her for this?

Chen Changsheng was speechless, but just when he was looking at her and preparing to say something, he suddenly froze.

It had clearly been five years since their parting, but Luoluo's appearance remained the same: young, beautiful, and cute, just like a child.

What was going on here? She should not have reached that level of cultivation, or did the Demi-human race have a technique similar to South Stream Temple's secret youth-retaining technique?

"Teacher?" Luoluo softly asked.

Chen Changsheng woke from his stupor and said, "I truly am a little angry."

Luoluo nervously thought, did Teacher hear about Xuanyuan Po's words? Or did he hear about what I said?

Teacher knows that I like him and so is angry?

Chen Changsheng explained, "Since you'd already heard about the rumors before the matter, why didn't you send a letter to the Li Palace for help? I am your teacher; I won't just throw you aside and stop caring about you."

Luoluo was at first astonished at these words, and then extremely happy.

Yes, how can Teacher just throw me aside? At the most dangerous moment, he would definitely break through the clouds and take me away in a cloud of golden light.

But if I told the Li Palace first, the Human race would definitely handle it a different way. Teacher, would you still come yourself?

Luoluo thought to herself, I definitely have to keep my intention hidden from Teacher, even if I have to hide it for a lifetime.

As long as I get a lifetime, it's fine.

"Senior Bie Yanghong is about to leave."

Chen Changsheng's melancholy voice broke her sweet train of thought.

'Leave' here did not mean leaving White Emperor City, but leaving the world.

Luoluo was shocked, then sorrowful.

She did not feel sorrow over the senior that she had never met, but for other reasons.

An expert of the Divine Domain had been conspired against and

died in White Emperor City. An account would need to be made for this matter eventually.

Has it really come time for the humans and demi-humans to part? I just reunited with Teacher; will it be impossible to meet from now on?

She grabbed Chen Changsheng's belt, her face stricken with grief as she looked at him. "Teacher, I'm not willing."

Chen Changsheng had failed to avoid this, as her actions were as fast as lightning. Besides the increase in her strength, it was also because she had practiced this action countless times.

In the Orthodox Academy, whenever she would be driven back by Chen Changsheng to the Hundred Herb Garden, or later on in the Li Palace or Imperial Palace, she would always use this method to buy time.

She had an even more well-practiced move that could buy even more time. This was to fall over and grab Chen Changsheng's thigh.

But she was now somewhat older, so it was rather embarrassing to do that.

Chen Changsheng soothed, "It's not so serious as you imagine, but anything that's been done has a price that needs to be paid."

For the loss of an expert of the Divine Domain, White Emperor City would have to pay an extremely heavy price for the Human race to not pursue this matter.

Although he had not indicated whom, the target of his words was exceptionally clear.

Luoluo whispered, "Mother... is pregnant."

Through this, she was telling Chen Changsheng that Madam Mu's status was soon to be even more solidified. In contrast, her own status and weight in the Demi-human race would be crippled.

"But it's fine. I'll work hard."

Luoluo cutely stuck out her tongue.

The once-cheerful smile now seemed forced, even rather serious.

Chen Changsheng felt a deep pity as he gazed at her small face. "You don't need to do anything."

Luoluo very seriously replied, "Teacher, I actually have a lot of supporters, but since I believed that Teacher would come to save me, I didn't do anything."

Chen Changsheng said, "Even if you can do many things, you shouldn't do them."

Luoluo opened her eyes wide as she asked, "But why?"

Chen Changsheng petted her on the head. "Because she is your mother, and also because I happen to know that you like to stand at very high places."

Luoluo truly did like to stand at high places, like the banyan tree growing by the lake in the Orthodox Academy, the Hall of Pure Virtue in the Li Palace, or this palace hall she lived in right now.

Those who didn't understand her would think that the world's most revered princess only liked the feeling of looking down on others.

But Chen Changsheng knew that this was not the case.

Luoluo liked to stand at very high places because only by standing there could she see even farther places.

"How can a girl who likes to look into the distance remain here to be a female emperor?"

Chen Changsheng sincerely said to her.

Luoluo stared at him in a daze, then abruptly threw herself into his embrace. Tightly hugging him, she incessantly rubbed her face into his chest while letting out happy sounds.

It was a very soft sound, sometimes a meow and other times a snore. She sounded like a little cat that had just stuffed itself and was now stroked and petted.

Chapter 996 – Before the Bizarre Storm

Luoluo was greatly moved by Chen Changsheng's words.

But in Chen Changsheng's view, this was a matter of fact.

Even regarding becoming the female Emperor of the Demi-human race, if one wanted to do it, one should do it, and if one didn't want to do it, then one naturally didn't need to do it. This choice could not be affected by any other factors, not even the future of the entire continent.

Back when Tang Thirty-Six had said that he didn't want to be the head of the Tang clan, he had taken the same stance.

Luoluo knew of what he thought, but this matter-of-fact manner moved her even more.

After some time, she reluctantly pulled herself away from Chen Changsheng's chest and softly said, "I don't believe that Father supports Mother's view."

Chen Changsheng quietly thought for a while, then replied, "I also hope so, though I'm not very confident."

Betraying the humans and joining hands with the demons was enough to change the course of history for the Demi-human race and the entire continent.

For the future of the Demi-human race, the White Emperor could make any choice imaginable.

Based on Chen Changsheng's speculations, there were still some questions for which there was no explanation. For example, why was it that when the Tianhai Divine Empress was intimidating the entire continent, the White Emperor had never been wary of the Human race?

This was because they were not standing high enough, could not see far enough.

At the time, the internal problems within the Human race had still not been resolved. Shang Xingzhou was standing on the edge of society, quietly watching the capital, while the Pope remained in the Li Palace, gazing at the Imperial Palace with mixed emotions.

In those years, the White Emperor had secretly been supporting Shang Xingzhou, presumably to equalize the factions within the Human race.

Later, the Tianhai Divine Empress's death and the deaths of many more experts of the Human race meant that many of the internal conflicts within the Human race had also been resolved.

A united will had always been one of the most terrifying things, and one also had to consider it in light of the fact that the Demon race was much weaker due to its own internal discord.

In every aspect, there was seemingly an innate necessity for the Demi-human race to ally with the Demon race.

So Chen Changsheng could not make any definite judgment on the White Emperor's stance.

It now seemed that his and humanity's great hope lay in the opposing voices within the Demi-human race.

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A suffocating atmosphere pervaded White Emperor City, with the entire city patrolled by soldiers and somber Beast Guards.

Many of the usually bustling stores on West Avenue were closed and few people could be seen, making the place seem cold and cheerless.

Compared to the mood in the city, the vast plains along the two shores of the Red River were even more fraught with tension. Just like the Wildfire beneath the Celestial Trees, they were ready to explode into flames at any moment.

A riot had taken place within the Blackstone Army, stationed at Wild Mountain Pass. Demi-human General Xi He, after many difficulties, was able to stabilize the situation, preventing any large incident from occurring.

Even this most elite and most disciplined unit of beast cavalry had a shaky morale, much less those other armies guarding the mountains and the various tribes, big and small. According to the news from all around, in two short days, several bloody conflicts had already taken place amongst the Demi-human Army and various tribes were already beginning to gather troops.

This was a sign of war, a presage to a storm.

What was soon to happen was not a war with the demons or the humans, but one between the two great factions within the Demi-human race.

The entirety of the Demi-human race had already split into two very clear factions.

Madam Mu, representing the will of the Imperial clan, and the Xiang clan leader, representing the Council of Elders, supported the alliance with the Demon race.

Standing across from them was Luoluo's faction. They had the bureaucracy as represented by the Prime Minister and the support of many tribes, and their hope was to continue the friendship with the Human race.

The former's strength was greater than the latter's, but the latter had a very determined stance and now had the strong support of the Human race, represented by Chen Changsheng.

If Madam Mu wanted to force the declaration of the decree to the world, the Demi-human race really might fall into a civil war.

No one was willing to see this, so before the conflicts flared up, the Xiang clan leader and all the other demi-human personages hoped to convince the other side through negotiation. As a result,

no pedestrians were seen on the streets of White Emperor City for two days while the estates of the elders and ministers welcomed guest after guest. Even the court meetings had been put to a stop.

The places receiving the most guests were the Xiang clan's estate and the Daoist Church of the Western Wastes.

The former was probably because the Demon Lord was residing in the large courtyard nearby, under the protection of the Xiang clan.

The latter was because it was where Chen Changsheng resided.

The Pope of the Human race and the Demon Lord were living in the same city, separated by only ten-some li. This was something that had never once happened in history.

The atmosphere of the city had naturally reached an unprecedented level of strangeness.

Many tribal leaders, great merchants, and officials would enter the Xiang clan's estate and come out some time later. It was impossible to tell from their expressions what had happened in the estate or how their talks with the Demon Lord had gone, or even if they had met the Demon Lord. In short, everything was shrouded in mystery.

Chen Changsheng had used one day to meet the representations of the various factions.

The Bear tribe leader and the Shi clan leader had brought the leaders of many small tribes forward to pay their respects.

For a moment, the Daoist Church of the Western Wastes was packed with people.

When two young representatives of the Meng clan entered the church and voiced their support for the Human race with the firmest of tones, Chen Changsheng was greatly shocked.

It was not because the passion expressed by these two had elicited

doubt, but because he recognized them.

Many years ago, when he traveled from Xining Village to the capital with the aim of entering the Six Ivy Academies, he saw a pair of hunter brothers from the mountains. These hunter brothers ultimately succeeded in entering Star Seizer Academy, becoming honored officers of the Great Zhou. He had never imagined that these two brothers were actually demi-humans.

Now that he thought about it, this must have been an agreement between the Great Zhou Army and the Meng clan.

The once-Principal of Star Seizer Academy, Chen Guansong, had truly been an extraordinary individual. It was no wonder that he had been Shang Xingzhou's only candidate for next leader of the Great Zhou Army. Alas, he had ultimately died in the final Phoenix flames of the Tianhai Divine Empress, so all his plans and schemes came to nothing. Fortunately, he had still left some protections for the later generations.

As the hour grew late, the various tribal representatives and officials began to leave the church, leaving only the most important personages. They were already the firmest allies of the Human race, and today's happenings had filled them with even more confidence. However, there were still some matters that made them very uneasy.

"If His Majesty leaves seclusion, he can settle everything with a word. Even if his injuries need rest, how can he not appear for such a major event?"

These words of the Bear tribe elder made the Prime Minister think for a very long time, after which he finally spoke.

"In these last few years, no one has personally seen His Majesty, and neither have I."

"A few days ago, the Chief Elder sensed His Majesty's spiritual sense," the Shi clan leader impassively said. "Old Xiang is the most

patient and enduring person I have ever met in my entire life. I found it impossible to understand why he chose to jump out this time. Moreover, all the tribes along the Red River know that he has never had a good relationship with the Empress. This could change just because of His Majesty's spiritual sense? If he's really the Empress's man, who can say that he wasn't lying that night?"

These whispered words caused Chen Changsheng to silently think for a very long time.

He knew that these demi-human personages were using various methods to remind him, warn him.

But this matter was far too inconceivable, so even though they were sure that no one else was around, they still only dared to bring up this idea through vague and ambiguous methods.

"Any matter has to be seen with one's own eyes before determining truth and falsehood. I do not wish for the demi-humans to fall into civil war, but this situation before us must be broken as quickly as possible."

Chen Changsheng paused for a while, then said, "I will go see His Majesty the White Emperor."

Chapter 997 – Before the Cold Answer

There were no clouds in the sky, only the manifold stars scattered about like sesame seeds, with no obvious law or pattern. No matter in which direction one looked, they seemed to be spread in a smooth and well-proportioned manner.

Chen Changsheng stood by a window, looking up at the starry sky that truly did seem closer than the ground, as he recounted his earlier conversations.

Luoluo stood beside him, her left hand habitually grasping his sleeve. Her head tilted in thought, she said, "So just meet him then."

Chen Changsheng glanced at her and said, "This matter must be done secretly. Your mother must be kept unaware."

The Shi clan leader had already noted the likely area of the White Emperor's secluded cultivation on a map and given it to him.

If he wanted to go there, he needed to use a secret path in the Imperial Palace.

In his view, even though Luoluo was the noble princess, she had no control over Madam Mu's deliberate suppression of the Imperial City.

Luoluo blinked and then earnestly said, "Be at ease, Teacher. I happen to be your student, so I'm quite capable in these matters."

Chen Changsheng felt like these words had a hint of Su Li or Tang Thirty-Six about them, so he couldn't help but smile.

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As he walked out from the humid, gloomy, and stuffy stone passage, Chen Changsheng was simultaneously assaulted by the sight of a snowy mountain and the morning light.

The mountain was several thousand zhang tall. Its lower half was made of black cliffs and primordial forests while its upper half was completely blanketed in white snow, blinding in the morning sun. The mountain rose up abruptly from the edge of a lake and stretched far into the north. It was impossible to see where it ended, even making one wonder whether it might extend until the end of the world. So magnificent it was that it seemed to have been left behind by a god.

Chen Changsheng knew that this snowy mountain that extended for countless li was that mountain range often brought up in books, the Starfall Mountains.

The Starfall Mountains stretched along the shore of the Western Sea, abruptly rising from the lands north of White Emperor City, with the sea a hundred-some li to their left. Their peaks had been covered in snow for tens of thousands of years, and the mountains stretched for tens of thousands of li, reaching all the way to the extreme north. In the middle of them was a relatively flat area called Zhanling.

If one started from there and worked their way southeast for ten-some days and nights, they would come to the westernmost Cong Province Army headquarters of the Human race.

Between Zhanling and the Cong Province Army headquarters was a grassland. Once the ancestral land of the Elves, it was now in the complete possession of Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong.

Chen Changsheng walked up to the lake and looked at the mountain range on the other side.

He recalled that it was written in the Daoist Canon that the Red River arose from one of the snowy peaks in these mountains, and then he remembered that the grassland within was connected to him, giving him a somewhat strange feeling.

Ever since the demi-humans had established their country on the shores of the Red River, generation after generation of White

Emperors and Empresses had been buried within the Starfall Mountains.

According to the laws set down by the ancestral spirits, to prevent any evildoer from stealing the remains or true blood of these great demi-humans, the successive generations of White Emperors had never built any sort of mausoleum within these mountains. When their lives reached their terminus, they would take that secret path Chen Changsheng had just used to come to these mountains and randomly choose a place to close their eyes and allow their soul to return to the sea of stars.

Of course, other than when they were on the verge of death, the White Emperors would often come to the Starfall Mountains whenever they did not have government affairs to handle. Whether it was to pay homage to their ancestors, enjoy the scenery, or search for chances to break through, it was naturally difficult to not construct a few buildings in these snowy mountains to either offer sacrifices or rest. But all these buildings had extremely strict seals on them that made it extremely difficult for anyone except the White Emperor to enter.

The current White Emperor had engaged in a heaven-shaking battle with the Demon Lord in the snowy plains to the north of Mount Han. The Demon Lord had been severely injured and was later deposed by Black Robe and the Demon Commander. The White Emperor had also suffered grievous injuries, so he had spent the last few years in secluded cultivation within the Starfall Mountains. Other than figures like Madam Mu and the Xiang clan leader, very few people knew his exact location.

Chen Changsheng had the map provided by the Shi clan leader, so he was naturally not completely directionless. Crossing the snow with the Yeshi Step, he did not need long before he found the place.

Behind two extremely green and ancient pine trees was a massive cliff of black rock.

The cliff was topped by ice and snow that never melted. It was an exterior of bitter cold, utterly devoid of life, with nothing particularly strange about it.

The location marked on the map was incredibly broad. Not knowing where the entrance was, Chen Changsheng could only scatter his spiritual sense into his surroundings, but in doing so, he realized that there was a barrier in front of him.

This barrier was a wall of Qi that stopped his spiritual sense, but this actually calmed him down, as this confirmed that he was in the right place.

The black cliff and the frigid ice concealed an array. With just a moment's perception, he realized the formidable attribute of this array.

This array probably had the same root as the Tong Palace within the capital's Imperial Palace. It was strict and dangerous, imbued with the mysteries of life and death. Perhaps because it had taken in too much of the Qi from the mountains and icy lakes, this array was much colder and more callous than the Tong Palace, exuding a harsh aura and extremely strong imperial Qi.

Triggering this array would incur a might not much weaker than the seal of the Red River. Of course, it was still far weaker than the capital's Imperial Design.

Two days ago, when breaking through the Red River's seal, Chen Changsheng had used an excessive amount of the energy within the Orthodoxy's Divine Staff. He could not use it again, so how would he break through this array?

Since there was a method to form this array, it was only right that there be a corresponding method to break it.

Chen Changsheng was well-read in the Daoist Canon and had researched arrays during his cultivation, but he was still not skilled in this art. After examining it for a long time, he could still think of

only one possibility.

As he gazed at this black cliff, he once more felt that mysterious feeling.

If he had not at first mistaken her for an Elf girl, would they have ended up together earlier? If, on that day by the Tong River, he waited for just half a day more after reading that letter, could he have ridden the crane with her and come here together? If she were here, would she able to make out with a glance the gap in this array?

With a zing, several dozen swords appeared in the sky. With Chen Changsheng as the center, an awe-inspiring sword intent spread out, instantly shattering the snow drifting in the air.

Chen Changsheng gripped the Stainless Sword as he warily gazed at the outcrop at the very bottom of the black cliff.

The drifting snow came from the snow capping the cliff. It was falling because it had sensed the shaking that he could feel right under him.

The outcrop at the bottom of the cliff suddenly burst apart, and two people clambered out.

The several dozen swords vibrated, letting out terrifying buzzes. They did not strike, however, because Chen Changsheng recognized those two people.

It was Jin Yulu and Xiaode.

Jin Yulu had once acted as gatekeeper of the Orthodox Academy, resolving many problems for Chen Changsheng. Though they had not met in many years, the affection was still there.

Although Xiaode had once been his enemy, he had also always had a close relationship to the Human race. In the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, he and Xiao Zhang had charged into the Imperial Palace, helping the Tang Second Master seize control of the Imperial Design. One could imagine that he also been one of

Shang Xingzhou's collaborators.

This was proved from another side by the Shi clan leader's firm stance in the Heavenly Selection ceremony and in the following two days.

Chen Changsheng naturally would not attack them. He was just surprised to see them come out from the black cliff.

If the White Emperor really was in seclusion inside this cliff, had they been able to meet him?

At this moment, he himself did not know which answer he wanted to hear, as it seemed like neither answer was good.

Chapter 998 – Walking to the End of the Mountain Cave and Hearing Bad News

Jin Yulu was still wearing that silk robe decorated with patterns of copper coins, looking like a wealthy landlord. But his appearance was somewhat more ragged now, as he was covered in dirt and bits of stone. Xiaode looked even worse, his clothes caked in yellow mud of an even darker shade than the tawny and ruthless light in his eyes. They looked more like some sort of filthy object.

Jin Yulu was stunned to see Chen Changsheng standing in front of the cliff, but his expression quickly turned into one of relief, as he knew without even thinking that Chen Changsheng's presence had to do with Luoluo.

Xiaode viewed Chen Changsheng with a somewhat complex expression. In the last few years, he had often unwittingly conducted himself according to Chen Changsheng's style and demeanor.

In other words, he was learning from his once-most-hated foe. For them to suddenly meet today inevitably made things rather awkward for someone as proud as him.

Jin Yulu asked, "Your Holiness the Pope has come to see His Majesty?"

Chen Changsheng nodded. "Did the two of you see him?"

Jin Yulu shook his head, appearing particularly tired. "His Majesty is clearly inside, but it's impossible to get in."

Chen Changsheng was quiet for a while, then asked, "Is the Saint well?"

Jin Yulu answered, "I have not seen him, so I do not know."

A wary expression appeared on Xiaode's face.

Chen Changsheng said to him, "The Shi clan leader told me of

this place."

Xiaode understood the meaning hidden in these words and said, "Then we will have to depend on you."

The Shi clan leader was renowned for his foresight and caution. If he were not sure that Xiaode could not succeed, he would never have told Chen Changsheng where the White Emperor was spending his secluded cultivation.

Chen Changsheng gazed at the black cliff, feeling the might of the sealing array, his eyebrows perking upward.

In order to resolve all the problems facing him, he had to confirm the situation within the black cliff.

This was a view shared by both Chen Changsheng and the Shi clan leader.

Xiaode also felt the same, so after withdrawing from the Heavenly Selection ceremony that he had planned and prepared for many years, he had come to this black cliff and started digging.

Jin Yulu also felt the same, and he had come earlier than Xiaode and dug faster.

At present, Xiaode had been digging for two days and nights without rest while Jin Yulu had been digging for four days and nights.

Just now, Chen Changsheng had also been planning on using force to overcome this seal. This method relying purely on strength seemed crude, even idiotic, but it was often the best choice.

Experts like Xiaode and Jin Yulu naturally understood this reasoning as well.

Regrettably, they had still failed.

There was no need for Chen Changsheng to try again, but he wanted to go in and take a look.

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The cave was on the surface of the cliff, but it was not straight. Rather, it inclined upward, then went very deep, and then went upward again.

Chen Changsheng followed Jin Yulu and Xiaode for an extremely long time before finally reaching the end.

Seeing the deep claw marks in the walls around him and sensing the traces of violent Qi, he felt like he could really see what had been happening in the last few days.

Jin Yulu and Xiaode had entered berserk metamorphosis, their giant bodies crazily attacking the hard rock of the cliff, the massive image of a lion or panther occasionally appearing in the dark cave.

He quickly noticed the peculiar aspect of the cave. The wall in the very front was extremely smooth, as if constructed of jade. There was no blemish on its surface, not even a speck of dust.

Jin Yulu explained, "We tried changing directions, but we've never been able to get past this stone wall. This means that this place is the living pivot of the array."

Chen Changsheng asked, "What is the stone wall itself made of?"

Jin Yulu said, "It should be the legendary Starstone. It has a weight many times greater than one would think from its volume. Even an expert of the Divine Domain would find it very hard to move."

The name 'Starstone' made Chen Changsheng think of the Orthodoxy treasure that Daoist Baishi had once been entrusted with. After thinking for a few moments, he stepped forward and gave the wall a fierce slash with the Stainless Sword.

Clang! The Stainless Sword was bright and sharp as ever, not harmed in the slightest, but it had only been able to leave a very

faint scratch on the wall.

If he wanted to use the Stainless Sword to break this wall, he would need many days.

Chen Changsheng was somewhat disappointed, but he had no idea of the shock in Jin Yulu's and Xiaode's eyes.

Besides its unimaginable density and weight, Starstone was most famous for its incredible hardness.

Jin Yulu and Xiaode had attempted many times, but neither the claws of their true bodies in berserk metamorphosis or the high-level magical artifacts on their persons had been capable of leaving a single mark on the Starstone.

A casual slash of Chen Changsheng's sword had made a small scratch on the wall. Just how sharp was this sword?

Xiaode had fought against Chen Changsheng's sword in the alley of the Northern Military Department, but he had not found it so terrifying back then. He soon understood that this was probably a result of Chen Changsheng's massive advancement in the path of the sword over the last few years.

Chen Changsheng asked, "Since this is a sealing array, someone should have set it up, so who could have placed such a heavy stone wall over the living pivot of this array?"

Jin Yulu replied, "It was most likely the Empress using the power of the seas to move the Starstone here and seal this place."

Xiaode suddenly said, "Starstone can absorb star radiance."

Chen Changsheng was somewhat confused at this sudden comment, but he quickly understood, his expression turning grim.

Star radiance was not starlight, but an invisible energy gathered by the invisible line swaying between the cultivator and their distant star.

The true essence within a cultivator's body was also star

radiance. Not even a Saint could escape this fact.

If this stone wall was continuously absorbing star radiance, that also meant that it was absorbing the White Emperor's true essence.

Even if the White Emperor had an unfathomable cultivation level and did not care about the effects and disturbance of the Starstone, he was residing in the black cliff to recuperate and cultivate. Why trouble himself so?

All these clues pointed at one possibility.

"Whether it's the Heavenly Selection ceremony or the alliance with the demons, they actually had nothing to do with my Demi-human race, only the ambition of the Great Western Continent. Of course, this only applies if His Majesty has already returned to the sea of stars."

In a very short time, Jin Yulu seemed to have grown much older, his voice becoming much more shaky.

This possibility was not too great. A Divine Domain expert returning to the sea of stars would be sensed by the entire continent through omens in the heavens.

It was for this reason that when the blue-clothed visitor died, Madam Mu almost immediately learned of it, even though she was eighty thousand li away. It was also for this reason that Madam Mu had first activated the seal of the Red River before attempting to kill Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi.

And the White Emperor was one of the Saints. If he really did return to the sea of stars, not even the most powerful of seals could prevent this news from getting out. The heavens and earth would assuredly tremble at this event.

Xiaode sternly said, "Even if His Majesty is still okay, the circumstances might still be very dangerous. His Majesty took severe injuries in the battle with the Demon Lord. With the Empress using such methods, not only might His Majesty's injuries

have not improved, they might be getting worse by the day. If a few more days are allowed to pass, perhaps the worst scenario really might happen."

This possibility made Jin Yulu's and Xiaode's expressions very gloomy, but Chen Changsheng was even calmer than before.

Based on his thoughts before entering the black cliff, both the White Emperor's death and his living well counted as extremely bad news for the Human race. In the former, it meant that no one within the Demi-human race was left to suppress Madam Mu's ambitions. In the latter, it meant that the White Emperor truly was of one mind with Madam Mu and wanted to ally with the demons. In the shadow of such a Saint, what could Chen Changsheng do?

Now, the speculation was that the White Emperor was heavily injured and imprisoned by Madam Mu, where he was weakening by the day. This was actually the best situation.

This meant that the Xiang clan leader had faked the White Emperor's decree on that night, that the White Emperor truthfully still supported the humans.

Then as long as he was rescued, everything could be easily resolved.

At this moment, an extremely bright and clear cry of a crane came from outside the cave.

Chen Changsheng exited the cave and took the paper strip from the crane. His expression turned extremely grave.

The White Crane brought two pieces of news.

One good, one bad.

Xuanyuan Po had woken up. Bie Yanghong had fallen unconscious.

Chapter 999 – The Face in the Bronze Mirror

After receiving the letter, Chen Changsheng said a few things to Jin Yulu and Xiaode, and then left on the White Crane.

Jin Yulu and Xiaode glanced at each other with doubt and unease evident on their faces.

Before leaving, Chen Changsheng explained that he had something to do and that he would return after finishing it. Finally, he added that he hoped he would not have to finish this matter.

This was a very strange and incomprehensible set of words. Just what had happened that was more important than helping the White Emperor escape his imprisonment?

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On a snowcapped mountain ten-some li from the black cliff, the drifting snow and white garments melded into one.

Xu Yourong had been standing here for some time now. She saw Chen Changsheng follow Jin Yulu and Xiaode into the black cliff, saw the White Crane arrive, and saw Chen Changsheng leave.

She had an inkling of what had happened in White Emperor City, which had also affected her mood somewhat.

She had already observed the sealing array for sufficient time to find a method to break it.

She took a piece of white paper from her sleeve, folded it into a paper crane, and let it take flight.

The paper crane drifted along the winds until it finally reached the black cliff, where it dropped to the ground.

Xiaode warily looked around. Discovering nothing, he took the paper crane and unfolded it. He saw only two words written in a

graceful style, most likely the handiwork of a woman.

The two words were 'Sword Array'.

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With Xu Yourong's speed, only a very short time was needed to return to White Emperor City from the Starfall Mountains.

She did not return to the small courtyard behind the temple to the Celestial Tree, as she still did not wish to meet Chen Changsheng, but also because she subconsciously did not wish to see that sight.

She returned to the inn she had stayed at yesterday, though she did not return to her room. Instead, she went to the front hall and bought some of the Jietang steamed buns that this inn was famed for.

The mood in White Emperor City was tense and strange, and there were few pedestrians on the streets. The inn was naturally doing poor business, and few people had come here to leisurely take their breakfast.

Those people who still wanted to eat out at these times had to be truly lively people with nothing to do, and since they were lively, they were also very good at chatting.

While Xu Yourong was eating the steamed bun along with beef, eggs, and porridge, she was also listening to the chatter from the guests at the table next to hers.

As of late, the most exciting things in White Emperor City had naturally been the Heavenly Selection ceremony and then the appearances of the Demon Lord and Chen Changsheng.

As for the exciting gossip, it was naturally the secret exposed by Xuanyuan Po in front of the Imperial City, the one to which Princess Luoluo had personally admitted.

"I don't know what His Holiness thinks about it, but since he traveled over vast distances on a crane and also said those words, he probably loves the princess, right?"

"I hear that the humans are very afraid of discussing this sort of thing, but when have we demi-humans ever cared about that? If you love each other, just sleep together."

"I hear that His Holiness is engaged to the Holy Maiden, but when have we demi-humans ever cared about that? Just take her, and if you really can't take her, then just sleep together."

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Xu Yourong's mood had already been rather downcast, and this hearty helping of gossip while she was eating made it impossible for her to eat her fill, causing her mood to worsen.

The brightly-lit Dao heart, calm as water, had been forgotten on the wayside.

She took a plain steamed bun and a plate of pickled vegetables and returned to her room.

She cleaned herself up a little and then sat in front of the table. She sat across from a bronze mirror, entering a daze as she gazed at her reflection.

The bronze mirror was not too clear, the reflection rather blurred, but the face in the mirror was still beautiful, would still make the common people imagine the most beautiful of flowers.

'I am her teacher. If I do not permit her to marry, she cannot be married.'

What an overbearing set of words. How excellent the relationship between teacher and student must be!

She silently derided.

She was well aware that to Chen Changsheng, the little Black

Dragon was more like a favor that would need to be repaid for the rest of his life. The true problem was Luoluo.

From every perspective, Luoluo was the sort of girl that every man would like, and this was not even considering that her love for Chen Changsheng was that sort of clean love that demanded nothing.

She could not do this—she could not love Chen Changsheng more than she loved herself. She could not even understand how anyone could do it.

She only knew that she wanted to walk the thousand-year-long path of cultivation together with Chen Changsheng, but also knew what her greatest challenge would be.

The more she thought, the unhappier she became. Her mouth formed a pout, making a girlish expression that no one on the outside had ever seen before.

She looked at herself in the mirror and whispered, "You're so beautiful, you're the most beautiful, you're the most beautiful girl in the world, and it's not like he's blind."

After saying this, she came to her senses. She felt thoroughly ashamed, letting out a squeak as she covered her face.

At this moment, a thin layer of fog suddenly emerged from the bronze mirror.

Xu Yourong turned stern and quickly calmed herself down. There was no anger or shame in her eyes, only serene beauty.

She was the Holy Maiden, her temperament like the spring forest fresh from the rain.

The thin fog in the mirror began to slowly change, condensing into lines thick or thin as the outline of a face formed.

Although the image was blurred so that the features could not be made out, there was an inexplicable feeling that this was an

incredibly handsome face that gave off the temperament of a lofty mountain.

Xu Yourong looked at the person in the mirror and reported, "I personally went to see the seal. Since the White Emperor is still alive, there should be a means of getting out, or at least of passing on messages."

The man in the mirror remained quiet for a very long time. It was obvious that these ordinary words had impacted his mental state.

Xu Yourong did not question, only quietly waited.

The person sighed, tinged with an indescribable regret, even some sorrow.

He replied, "Since this is the case, let us help him get out."

Xu Yourong replied, "I have already sent a message to Chen Changsheng. With his comprehension, he should be able to quickly break the array."

The person advised, "Since things have already reached this state, all of you must be careful."

Xu Yourong suddenly asked, "Why is he willing to help you? Do you not have any other methods? In the current situation, you have many chances to kill him."

The person asked back, "Then why are you willing to help me?"

Xu Yourong replied, "For the sake of the greater picture."

The person calmly replied, "It is all the same reason. Thus, he is not helping me, and I also am not concerned about him. As for killing him... there will be many more chances in the future."

Xu Yourong lastly asked, "As for Sir Bie... is there really nothing to be done?"

The person thought for a while, then replied, "If not even that evil disciple can cure him, then nothing can be done."

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The so-called greater picture naturally concerned how the Human race would continue to exist and thrive on the continent.

Xu Yourong needed to consider this problem, the person in the mirror needed to consider this problem, and Chen Changsheng, as the current Pope, naturally needed to consider this problem as well, even though he believed that he did not have this ability.

There were many things that he did not have the ability to resolve. Even the medical arts that he was most skilled at were so useless at certain moments.

The White Crane flew through the large tree within the Celestial Tree temple and landed in the withered remains of the small courtyard.

Xuanyuan Po's face was pale, his right arm hanging withered and strengthless at his side. Upon seeing Chen Changsheng, he barely managed to raise a smile.

Chen Changsheng walked up and hugged him, patting his thick back three times. Without saying anything, he entered the room.

Bie Yanghong was leaning on the wall, his eyes closed, his complexion as usual. He looked like he was sleeping.

Chen Changsheng silently walked up to him. Taking the needles from his fingers, he began the treatment.

Everyone said that his Cinnabar Pill could regrow bones and revive the dying, but those were just exaggerated rumors. The Cinnabar Pills and the divine blood contained within could only treat external injuries like blood loss, broken bones, and chest wounds.

Bie Yanghong's injuries had been inflicted by the two Angels from the Sacred Light Continent. Both his body and soul had

suffered injuries that could not be reversed. They were simply impossible to treat.

After some time, Chen Changsheng's clothes had become completely soaked. Fortunately, after the Tianhai Divine Empress had reconstructed his meridians, he no longer gave off that scent that could make the entire world go mad.

Bie Yanghong slowly opened his eyes, finally awake.

Chen Changsheng saw in the depths of his eyes that dim and gray Qi.

This was an incredibly light strand of Qi, like the new snow falling on the snowy plains, a rain drop falling into a mountain stream.

If not for his formidable spiritual sense, he would never have noticed it.

This Qi was the aura of death.

Chapter 1000 – The Death of Bie Yanghong

After two days, Madam Mu should have already surmised through certain details that Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi were still alive and were in the small courtyard.

But she would presumably not strike Bie Yanghong or Wuqiong Bi, as Chen Changsheng had already arrived and the rift in the Demi-human race was extremely deep.

She would only do so if she really did go crazy, not caring that the fire of a civil war would burn the Demi-human race into nothing.

The river winds blew against the tree within the Celestial Tree temple, causing its leaves to rustle, a sound that could clearly be heard within the small courtyard.

This quiet moment was ideal to talk, to communicate a few things.

It was in this moment that Bie Yanghong used some mysterious method to make Wuqiong Bi fall asleep.

Chen Changsheng asked, "Senior, do you have anything you want to leave behind? Or something that we can do?"

Bie Yanghong said, "In the past, I believed that I would leave behind a descendant of my bloodline. Since this is no longer the case, there is no longer a need to say anything."

His expression was very calm as he said this, his tone indifferent, but anyone could hear that anguish concealed within.

An expert who had dominated the generation had no one to send him off at the moment of his death and had even had his son die not too long ago. Anyone would feel that this was a difficult burden to bear.

Chen Changsheng said, "For Sir to leave your thoughts on the past for the common people is also good."

Many people knew that Bie Yanghong was a scholar who had come from the Ten Thousand Years Pavilion of Xiling, but his path of cultivation and his life experiences had always remained a mystery.

"Just what part of my past do the common people want to know the most?"

Bie Yanghong glanced at Wuqiong Bi and sighed, "It's probably why I married her."

Chen Changsheng considered what to say, then earnestly said, "There are truly many people that can't understand."

"Although no one has ever dared to mention this matter in front of the two of us, I know that this has been a conversation topic in many restaurants and inns across the world. There have even been many storytellers who have helped us think about the most fantastical of stories, imagined for me all sorts of romantic scenarios. The person called Bie in those stories is truly in such tragic circumstances that even I feel great sympathy for him..."

Bie Yanghong faintly smiled and continued, "It is all fake. How can life have so many forced choices? And certainly not for someone like me."

Chen Changsheng thought, this truly is reasonable. An expert of the Divine Domain holds an unimaginable amount of power and influence, not much different from a king's. There's no way he would patiently endure for so many years just because of a few forced choices.

Bie Yanghong continued, "This story is truly much simpler than all of you have imagined. I was born in a poor family and was taken in and raised by my teacher. I grew up together with Junior Sister, and she respected and loved me. There was never anything about her that made me unhappy, so I naturally loved her and cherished her. Once we grew a little older, I naturally married her."

Chen Changsheng had not expected the story to truly be so simple.

Bie Yanghong added, "...Though she truly was not like her current self when I married her. But when you carefully think about it, isn't it my fault?"

Chen Changsheng answered, "If this is true, then Senior's treatment of her arrogance was allowing her to indulge in evil."

Bie Yanghong said, "So I say that I am not a gentleman, nor am I a good person."

Chen Changsheng still found this somewhat impossible to accept. "I still feel that this isn't right."

Bie Yanghong looked at him and asked, "If your wife treated you extremely well but had a poor personality, or was an evil and wicked person, what would you do?"

This question seemed easy to answer, but further introspection would reveal its deep complexities. Chen Changsheng had never thought about this question before, so he naturally didn't know how to answer.

Wuqiong Bi had just woken up. Upon hearing this question, she naturally believed that Bie Yanghong was talking about herself.

She instantly became furious, cursing, "I just killed a few pieces of trash that didn't respect their elders; is that being evil and wicked? You conscienceless thing!"

The serenity of the courtyard was instantly broken, with everything sounding loud and noisy.

Bie Yanghong did not explain. With an exceptionally serious, yet also exceptionally warm, expression, he said, "In the future, do not do these things anymore, okay?"

Just like the day before, Wuqiong Bi once more felt flustered. She muttered, "Didn't I already promise you this? What do you plan to

do by always bringing it up?"

Bie Yanghong smiled at her. "Junior Sister, please forgive me for no longer being able to accompany you."

Wuqiong Bi felt even more flustered. Grabbing his clothes, she shrieked, "What nonsense are you babbling!"

Bie Yanghong sighed. "I'm not speaking nonsense."

Wuqiong Bi turned pale. Her nerves made her tongue-tied as she stammered out, "Don't talk carelessly either."

Bie Yanghong answered, "I am not speaking carelessly."

Seized by an absolute terror, Wuqiong Bi yelled, "I don't permit you to leave, or else... or else I cut off Guan Bai's other hand! Or else... I'll go join the demons!"

"I once thought about requesting His Holiness to take me away, leaving you only with a letter of divorce. But I knew that you would still guess that I was dead, so I might as well just tell you..."

Bie Yanghong tenderly stroked her face. "Because you know that I would never not want you."

Xuanyuan Po stood by the door, constantly wiping his tears with his sleeve but always failing to wipe them all off.

He didn't quite understand what was going on, but he felt a terrible heartache at this senior's words.

"Can I trouble you to buy some steamed buns?"

Bie Yanghong looked at him and somewhat embarrassedly said, "I would like to eat the kind with beef and scallion stuffing."

Xuanyuan Po froze, then rushed out of the courtyard. He simply didn't care that he was still just recovering from his injuries and was incredibly weak.

He ran through the morning fog and steam to the steamed bun store, his heart heavy with regret as he wondered, why didn't I see

a few days ago that Senior wanted to eat beef buns?

Xuanyuan Po carried a full tray of buns, escorted by ten-some priests and Bear tribe experts back to the small courtyard.

This tray of buns was still steaming hot. If one tore open the soft skin, they could still smell the scent of beef, scallion, and spicy oil.

Alas, it was a little too late.

Bie Yanghong's eyes were closed. He was no longer breathing.

Xuanyuan Po froze. The steam rising from the tray in his hands drifted up into the sky and onto his face. It was warm and damp.

Chen Changsheng silently lowered his head. The fingers at his side were shaking, the swords in his sheath vibrating.

Xuanyuan Po kneeled in front of Bie Yanghong and placed the tray of buns down. He then began to reverentially kowtow, tears streaming down his face.

Wuqiong Bi noticed nothing. She blankly stared at Bie Yanghong, her eyes losing focus, her body swaying.

Bong! Bong! Bong! Bong! A bell rang within the temple to the Celestial Tree.

Wuqiong Bi woke up. Her eyes began to redden, and her lips began to tremble. She had finally understood what had happened.

A mournful weeping rose from the courtyard.

Chen Changsheng walked out of the courtyard. The ringing of the bell from the temple reminded him of the night Archbishop Mei Lisha left the world.

On that night, bells had rung throughout the capital.

Was the sound of the bell really the call to return home?

Was the sea of stars really the homeland of all souls?

Whether noble or lowly, beautiful or ugly?

Just like weeping?

No matter how unpleasant it was to hear, it was still so saddening?

Table of Contents

[Way of Choices](#)

[Synopsis](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Chapter 901 – The Little Red Flower Leaves the String](#)

[Chapter 902 – The Blade Descends, Blue Clothes Soaked](#)

[Chapter 903 – The Flower's Weight upon the World](#)

[Chapter 904 – Between Three Seconds](#)

[Chapter 905 – Between the Divine](#)

[Chapter 906 – Between Father and Son](#)

[Chapter 907 – Between East and West](#)

[Chapter 908 – Between Life and Death](#)

[Chapter 909 – The Most Resolute Stance](#)

[Chapter 910 – Dissolute as the Dispersing Clouds, a Response from the Forest](#)

[Chapter 911 – South of the Stream, Somebody Speaks](#)

[Chapter 912 – Mutual Loathing](#)

[Chapter 913 – The Incident in the Temple](#)

[Chapter 914 – Thoughts Are Easy to Guard, but Not the Heart](#)

[Chapter 915 – So Follow Our Hearts to Where They Are Comfortable](#)

[Chapter 916 – The Divine Matters of Eating, Drinking, Man and Woman](#)

[Chapter 917 – Where Can the Rushing Blood Settle?](#)

[Chapter 918 – Speaking of the Past in White Emperor City](#)

[Chapter 919 – Seeing an Old Friend in a Small Tavern](#)

[Chapter 920 – Knowing Her Highness Through Watching Her Food](#)

[Chapter 921 – Rain Will Fall Today, So It Is Forbidden to Be Married Off](#)

[Chapter 922 – The Reason Young People Live](#)

[Chapter 923 – The Journey of Old Youths in Mount Li](#)

[Chapter 924 – Meeting Qiushan in a Great River of Myriad Swords](#)

[Chapter 925 – Asking a Blind Man the Way, a Sword's Music in the Heart](#)

[Chapter 926 – Su Li's Sword Path](#)

[Chapter 927 – Breaking Through the Sword Path](#)

[Chapter 928 – The Last Lesson](#)

[Chapter 929 – If You Want to Enter My Door, You Must Endure This Sword](#)

[Chapter 930 – The Ups and Downs, and the People of the Plains Are Just as Before](#)

[Chapter 931 – Parting Is Only a Letter Away](#)

[Chapter 932 – A Letter from Shang Xingzhou](#)

[Chapter 933 – One Temple Rules the World—Xining?](#)

[Chapter 934 – Someone Is Breaking Through the Clouds, Descending with the Light of the Sun](#)

[Chapter 935 – Using a Mountain to Imprison a Dragon](#)

[Chapter 936 – The Wind Blows the Shadow of the Tree into the Shape of a Black Robe](#)

[Chapter 937 – The Sight of a World Extinguished](#)

[Chapter 938 – The Angel from the Other Continent](#)

[Chapter 939 – The First Chapter of the Battle Between the Divine](#)

[Chapter 940 – The Iron Sword Is Still Here, the Face Has Never Changed](#)

[Chapter 941 – Meeting](#)

[Chapter 942 – The Diplomatic Mission from the Great Western Continent](#)

[Chapter 943 – The Young Man from the Demon Race](#)

[Chapter 944 – The Starry Sky Can Kill People, but Who Will Save Them?](#)

[Chapter 945 – There Are Records of Herding the Clouds over the Sea](#)

[Chapter 946 – It's Precisely Because of So Many Affections That One Deceives Oneself](#)

[Chapter 947 – The Whole World Chooses](#)

[Chapter 948 – A Reason to Change](#)

[Chapter 949 – The Young Man Wearing a Bamboo Hat](#)

[Chapter 950 – No One Knows of This Youth](#)

[Chapter 951 – With the Heavenly Thunder Concealed, Who Can Recognize It?](#)

[Chapter 952 – One Punch](#)

[Chapter 953 – A Blade Faster than Sound](#)

[Chapter 954 – Another Punch](#)

[Chapter 955 – Like a Rock](#)

[Chapter 956 – The Same Twilight Glow](#)

[Chapter 957 – If There Is a Task, Let the Student Undertake It](#)

[Chapter 958 – Xuanyuan, Expose](#)

[Chapter 959 – Different Kinds, of Red](#)

[Chapter 960 – White, Vegetables](#)

[Chapter 961 – The Autumn Mountains, the Source of Trust](#)

[Chapter 962 – Burning the Heart with Fire \(I\)](#)

[Chapter 963 – Burning the Heart with Fire \(II\)](#)

[Chapter 964 – The Ancestral Spirits of the Demi-human Race](#)

[Chapter 965 – The Anointment of Sacred Light](#)

[Chapter 966 – The Gradually Emerging Truth](#)

[Chapter 967 – Before Tomorrow](#)

[Chapter 968 – Before Dawn](#)

[Chapter 969 – Before the Lonely Mountain](#)

[Chapter 970 – The Lightning Tearing Open the Darkness](#)
[Chapter 971 – The Stone Seal That Cannot Be Injured](#)
[Chapter 972 – All Alone, a Stranger in a Strange Land](#)
[Chapter 973 – Xuelao City's Sincerity](#)
[Chapter 974 – Opening a New Chapter in History?](#)
[Chapter 975 – A Temple of Xining Worries the World](#)
[Chapter 976 – In the Heavens Is a Capital of White Jade](#)
[Chapter 977 – The Person in the Painting](#)
[Chapter 978 – The Rivers and Mountains Are Truly Like a Painting](#)
[Chapter 979 – Hearing Your Voice](#)
[Chapter 980 – The Order of a Teacher Is Difficult to Defy](#)
[Chapter 981 – Who Else Is There?](#)
[Chapter 982 – The Pear Blossom Falls](#)
[Chapter 983 – Sword Domain](#)
[Chapter 984 – Frosty Clouds and Collapsing Rocks](#)
[Chapter 985 – The Sword Descends into a Thousand Piles of Snow](#)
[Chapter 986 – One Person's South Stream Temple Sword Array](#)
[Chapter 987 – The Sword Is His Fate](#)
[Chapter 988 – The Young Lady Walking Up to the Small Courtyard](#)
[Chapter 989 – I Use a Sea of Fire to Meet the Yellow Springs](#)
[Chapter 990 – A Sword Shines on the Shore of the Red River](#)
[Chapter 991 – I Request My Lord to Kill Two People](#)
[Chapter 992 – Only Understanding After Many Years](#)
[Chapter 993 – Quietly](#)
[Chapter 994 – Lovers Prattle Beneath the Celestial Tree](#)
[Chapter 995 – Meow](#)
[Chapter 996 – Before the Bizarre Storm](#)
[Chapter 997 – Before the Cold Answer](#)
[Chapter 998 – Walking to the End of the Mountain Cave and Hearing Bad News](#)
[Chapter 999 – The Face in the Bronze Mirror](#)
[Chapter 1000 – The Death of Bie Yanghong](#)